

# **GENDER OVER WORDS**

## **A Critical Content Analysis of Literary Interviews with Female Authors**

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Tutkielma tarkastelee naiskirjailijoiden sukupuolittuneita kuvauksia ja puhetapoja kirjailija-haastatteluissa brittiläisen päivittäissanomalehden *The Guardianin* kulttuuriosastolla. Keskeisin tutkimuskysymys on, kuinka naiskirjailijoita kuvataan sanomalehden kirjailija-haastatteluissa. Aihetta lähestytään selvittämällä, millaisia aihepiirejä haastatteluissa käsitellään ja millaisia subjektiasemia naiskirjailijoihin liitetään. Tutkimus käsittelee kriittisesti sukupuolesta (ainakin näennäisesti) lähtöisin olevia ja sukupuoleen liittyviä aihepiirejä, subjektiasemia ja kuvaustapoja. Naiskirjailijoiden asemaa ja toimijuutta taidekentällä ja yhteiskunnassa pohditaan erityisesti feministisen kritiikin sekä journalistiikan ja mediakulttuurin tutkimuksen näkökulmista.

Tutkimusongelma ja -kysymykset nousevat naiskirjailijoiden ja -taiteilijoiden kohtaamasta epätasa-arvosta taidekentällä. Epätasa-arvo juontuu muun muassa sukupuolen käsitteen kahtia-jakautumisesta, sukupuolittuneista stereotypioista, taiteilijuuden ja luovuuden käsitteiden määrittelystä sekä taidekentän rakenteista, toimintatavoista ja käytännöistä, jotka ylläpitävät sukupuolieroja ja -syrjintää. Niin taiteen kuin journalismin kenttien on toistuvasti syytetty ylläpitävän ja tuottavan sukupuolieroa, seksistisiä näkemyksiä ja syrjintää.

Tutkimuksen kohteena ovat kulttuurijournalismi ja kirjailijahaastattelu, jotka sijoittuvat taiteen ja journalismin kenttien rajapinnalle. Perinteisesti kyseisiä kenttiä on pidetty suhteellisen omalakisina: taidekenttää ovat määritelleet esteettiset periaatteet ja journalismia demokraattisuuden ja objektiivisuuden vaateet. Kuitenkin yhä enenevässä määrin kenttien toimintaa ohjaavat kaupalliset päämäärät sekä postmodernit pyrkimykset yksilöllisyyteen ja monimuotoisuuteen. Toisaalta myös kenttien suhde on muuttunut, ja esimerkiksi taidekentän mediatisaatio vaikuttaa kirjailijoiden toimijuuteen taidekentällä ja yhteiskunnassa. Muutokset näkyvät myös kulttuurijournalismissa, joka yhä useammin painottaa sisällöissään populaarikulttuuria, taiteilijoiden persoonia, taiteen yhteyttä yhteiskuntaan ja journalistisia genrejä, kuten kirjailijahaastatteluja.

Tutkimusaineisto koostuu 52:sta naiskirjailijan haastattelusta, jotka on julkaistu *The Guardianin* ja sen sisarlehden *The Observerin* verkkolehden *theguardian.comin* kulttuuriosastolla vuonna 2015. Harkinnanvaraiseen otantaan perustuva aineisto pyrkii edustavuuteen. Aineisto on rajattu englanninkielisten maiden naiskirjailijoihin, ja siinä korostuvat kulttuuriosaston omat, laajat henkilöhaastattelut. Tutkimusmetodina on laadullinen sisällönanalyysi, jonka tuloksia tarkastellaan kriittisesti teorian pohjalta.

Huolimatta eroista naiskirjailijoiden ja heidän teostensa välillä kirjailijoiden käsittelemät aihepiirit ja heidän edustamansa subjektiasemat ovat hyvin samanlaisia haastattelusta toiseen. Haastattelut painottavat erityisesti naisten elämänsä maailman kokemuksia, sukupuolten välisen tasa-arvon kysymyksiä ja naisten kuvausta taiteessa sekä asemaa taidekentällä. Yhtäläisyys näkyy myös subjektiasemissa, joissa korostuvat äidin, vaimon ja yhteiskuntakriitikon sosiaaliset asemat. Lisäksi naisten kirjailijaidentiteetin kuvaukset ovat samankaltaisia. Yleisesti ottaen haastatteluissa on kriittinen sävy, ja naiskirjailijoiden kuvaustavat vaihtelevat perinteisten, feminiinisyyttä korostavien ja feminististen, vastustavien tapojen välillä. Kuvaustapoihin vaikuttavat niin kirjailijat, toimittajat kuin eri toimintakenttien perinteet. Loppujen lopuksi naiskirjailijoista välittyvä kuva on täynnä ristiriitaisuuksia, ja kuvaustavat korostavat vastakohtaisuuksia ja nojaavat vahvasti sukupuolieroihin.

Asiasanat: Kulttuurijournalismi, henkilöhaastattelu, kirjailijuus, naiskirjailija, sukupuoli, tasa-arvo

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## 1. Representing Female Authors

Female authors do not only write themselves but they are extensively written about on the pages of newspapers. This thesis studies the representation of female authors in literary interviews published in the culture section of the British national daily newspaper *The Guardian*. The representation is examined by studying what kind of subject matters are discussed in literary interviews and what kind of subject positions are taken by or given to female authors in feature articles of this type. The study is based on a qualitative content analysis of research material drawn from *The Guardian*'s online version *theguardian.com*. The content analysis covers 52 literary interviews with 48 female authors from 2015 and creates a representative sample of subject positions and subject matters featured in the interviews. The emphasis of the study is on gender-specific discourse, which means that I focus on analysing how the female authors' representation is influenced and constructed by their gender. In the analysis, I take a critical look at recurrent subject matters and subject positions that deal with gender or seem to have a gender-related origin.

I assume that the selection and choice of subject positions and subject matters is to a great extent gender-specific in literary interviews with female authors. In other words, female authors are expected, liable and inclined to address certain topics, for example, concerning gender, femininity, feminism and women's rights, status and roles in society, and to embody subject positions connected with feminism and femininity, for example, fall into the archetypal feminine roles or to take up roles as feminist speakers and critics. Thus, female authors' scope of speech and the roles available for them in the literary world are greatly influenced by their gender. For many female authors, gender-related topics and positions can even become representative qualities of them as public figures. Also, I think that there are a number of positive aspects in bringing forward feminine and feminist viewpoints into the public arena, as mainstream discourses more often than not inherently advocate patriarchal views.

Gender-specific ways of speaking and thinking prevail in society, and not least in the art world and journalism – the two fields that the literary interview is primarily connected with – which for long have been almost irrevocably masculine domains. For example, Liesbet van Zoonen has pointed out that the institutional ideals and social responsibilities of journalism are deeply gender-biased (1994, 148–150). What van Zoonen means is that the goals and ideals of journalism, such as objectivity, democracy and factuality, and some specific, especially esteemed genres, such as hard, political news, are perceived as masculine (1994, 148–150). Moreover, the idea of political agency in journalism – based on the Habermasian notion of the public sphere and its relation to journalism (Habermas 1991, 181) – is closely connected with the idea of modern rational and active citizen, which is profoundly masculine (Gatens 1996, 49–50). In contrast, women represent the communal, passive and static history and continuity of national identity (Ruoho and Torkkola 2010, 55–56). The ideals, ideas and goals of journalism and the ideological prejudice that they carry also influence organisational and newsroom agendas, strategies, conventions and contents of newspapers (van Zoonen 1994, 148–150).

Similarly, the cultural field has been slow to acknowledge female artists as fully-fledged actors of the art world. Even though the art world is usually celebrated as a field of innovation, progressive thinking and tolerance, it has been especially slow in accepting women as actors in the field. Traditionally, in Western society, artists and artistic imagination, creativity and competence have been connected with (white) men, masculinity and masculine sexuality, whereas women and their inferior standing in society have been seen as contradictory to the idea of creative power (Parker and Pollock 1981, 83). Even though, over the last fifty years, postmodern, postcolonial and feminist theories and criticism have challenged the supremacy of the male artist, the characteristics and descriptions connected with artists and creative work are deeply and persistently masculine (ibid.). However, at the same time, the use of creativity, performance and deconstruction typical of the cultural field afford authors and artists possibilities to question and challenge the normative gender categories. For example, feminist theorists Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler emphasise

the role of performance and role play in questioning and reconstructing the concept of gender. Gender is seen as socially constructed, and, ultimately, “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its result” (Butler 1999, 33). As a consequence of feminist theory, the unity and coherence of the category of women is called into question, which means that ultimately the whole concept and meaning of the female author is problematised, too (Rooney 2006a, 3–6).

These are only some of the ways in which female authors have been perceived. The conceptions and the prejudice they carry are not produced within the art world alone but relate to wider social ideas and attitudes that circulate in society. I believe that both the discourses of the art world and the discourses of journalism are partly responsible for the images of the female author, and meanings move to and fro between them. However, it is journalism that plays an important role in maintaining and distributing representations and conceptions in society. Journalism is sometimes described as “a discourse of a discourse”, which means that it borrows contents, subject matters and ways of speaking from other fields (Valtonen 2004, 215; also Fairclough 1995). Yet, in the end, the selection, modification, rearrangement and interpretation of these matters are done according to journalism’s own processes, conventions and strategies (*ibid.*). Traditional journalism strives for meeting the demands, expectations and ways of thinking of its audience, and usually it tries to cater for as a broad and heterogeneous audience as possible in order to maximise its income or to maintain the façade of democracy (*ibid.*). As a result, journalism has the tendency of simplifying the discourses of other fields and maintaining and even strengthening the most stereotypical, hegemonic ways of thinking and seeing, which, for example, often means that traditional gender roles and stereotypes are maintained and the dichotomy and difference between genders is highlighted (Ojajarvi 2004, 256; Chadwick 2007, 377). As well as constructing the image of the female author, journalism takes part in the reproduction of gender and gender roles in general (see Butler 1999).

Arts journalism and the literary interview are especially interesting research subjects for many reasons. First of all, many factors and actors contribute to the production of literary interviews published in newspapers. Subject matters discussed and opinions expressed are filtered through an interviewee, interviewer and possibly an editor. Contents and meanings are also governed by the official and unofficial guidelines, strategies and practices of the newsroom and the newspaper, as well as the pressures of the market and the opinions and the demands of the intended reader. (Rodden 2001, 20; Fairclough 1995, 39, 51–52) Traditionally, arts journalism has been characterised by relative autonomy from the ideals, objectives and editorial guidelines of journalism (Jaakkola 2015, 254). Nevertheless, the changing demands and objectives in the journalistic field, accelerating commercialisation of both cultural production and journalism, as well as influence of celebrity culture increasingly affect practices and contents of journalism and arts journalism alike (Jaakkola 2015, 131–132; Szántó et al. 2004, 10–11; Fairclough 1995, 86). Consequently, arts journalism is moving closer to the journalistic discourse and paradigm, which alters the contents and perspectives of the cultural pages and practices of arts journalism (Jaakkola 2015, 131–132).

The literary interview itself is a compelling subject of research because it has evaded both classification and academic interest (Masschelein et al. 2014a, 5). The literary interview is recurrently characterised as a postmodern “hybrid genre”, consisting of both the oral or written dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee and the edited text, as well as having its roots in the domains of both journalism and literature (Masschelein et al. 2014a, 17–19). Literary interviews are complex combinations of different literary genres and forms, especially if objects of authors’ performative and writers’ literary experimentation (Masschelein et al. 2014a, 1–2; Rodden 2001, 17). In addition, the contents of literary interviews relate both to the aesthetic discussions of the art world and to wider cultural, historical, social and political debates in society, and are increasingly affected by commercial demands (Rodden 2001, 17; Fairclough 1995, 51–52). As literary interviews are usually published in newspapers and magazines, some might argue that the final meaning of the interview is only produced by the reader, and that her understanding of the text

is greatly influenced by her prior knowledge of the topic, personal experience and world view and even the context of the reading (Hall 2006, 164) – for example, the reader can read inside the hegemonic code or take negotiated and oppositional positions, and reading can become both restrictive and transitive (Hall 2006, 172–173; Rooney 2006a, 7). Considering all the participants, flexibility of forms and possibilities of content, it is hardly inconceivable to call the literary interview a dramatic public performance, portraiture of the author or literary, artistic creation in its own right (Rodden 2001, 16).

That being said, I am not even trying to distinguish all the intervening factors or possibilities of meaning, but rather try to expose some of the ways in which female authors are depicted in journalism, and more specifically in arts journalism, and consider how these images relate to the gender-specific ways in which female authors have traditionally been perceived and perceive themselves. With gender<sup>1</sup>-specific discourse<sup>2</sup> I mean “groupings of utterances or sentences, statements which are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context and which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence” (Mills 1997, 11) and that become characteristic of only one gender in the dichotomous system of genders. For example, de Lauretis sees that gender is both a sociocultural construct and a strong semiotic apparatus, “a system of representation which assigns meaning ... to individuals within society” – and, it is both the product and the process (1987, 5). It is also reciprocal, as the social construction of gender affects subjectivity and subjective self-presentation affects the social construction (ibid., 9). Although gender is always historically specific, it has been highly systematic (ibid., 8).

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<sup>1</sup> In the thesis, *gender* is seen as a theoretical, conceptual construct that applies to certain processes and not real, historical women. It is “a representation of a relation, that of belonging to ... a category”, a relation between one entity and another or other entities. In society, gender representations constitute a symbolic gender system, which is connected with other cultural, social, political and economic factors and which accounts for social inequality. (de Lauretis 1987, 4–10)

<sup>2</sup> *Discourse* has no clear meaning; it refers both to individual utterances and groups of utterances which seem to be regulated in some way and which seem to have a coherence and a force to them in common and to the system of regulated practice which accounts for a number of statements. However, cultural theory, linguistics and critical theory all integrate discourse with use of language, institutional power and situatedness in the social system. (Mills 1997, 2–7)



Following the thinking and theoretical heritage of the influential French social and cultural theorists Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, I believe that it is important to analyse discourses and structures of society that take part in shaping our thinking, and that the fields of cultural production and journalism play important roles in producing, maintaining, distributing as well as deconstructing these discourses. It is important to expose how social constructions, such as gender, still affect positions and discourses available for each individual. From the stand-point of gender equality, gender-specific discourses serve both positive and negative ends. On one hand, they bend attention to potentially noteworthy issues; but, on the other hand, they hide and exclude other issues. Discourses often seem self-evident and natural, but, in reality, they are “principally organised around practices of exclusion” (Mills 1997, 12). Ultimately, discourses exist and work in relation to power, knowledge and truth in society (ibid., 17). It is important to cast light on discourses and discursive systems in order to recognise the potential impact they have on our own thinking. It is especially important to address conventional discourses that are taken for granted and analyse why these conventions are so persistent and whose interests they serve.

In general, my thinking relies on post-structural and feminist theories that regard historical, political and social practices and structures, such as society, ways of seeing, language, discourses and gender, as socially constructed in the relations between actors. My methodological thinking is mostly influenced by the conventions of social and cultural studies, and, thus, the theory chapters will concentrate on a socio-cultural and historical account of the subject matters in order to provide a cultural and social context for my thematic analysis. I will explore the issues presented in the introduction further in the theory and methodology chapters.

## **Research Problem and Research Questions**

The purpose of this thesis is to draw attention to the extent of gender-specific discourse in literary interviews with female authors. There is no denying that my research topic rises from a personal sense of frustration at the image and standing of female artists and authors in the cultural field. The lack of opportunities, visibility and prestige given to female authors and the substantial prejudice that female artists still face today are current and recurrent topics of discussion in the art world and also addressed on the pages of *The Guardian* regularly. The subordinate position of female authors is not only mirrored in the extent they are featured on the pages of newspapers but also the ways in which they are represented: for example, what subject positions are available for them and what subject matters they are connected with. On the other hand, the persistence of hegemonic discourses, deep-rooted problems with gender equality in journalism, and relative scarcity of research done on arts journalism and the literary interview also guide my research interest and objectives as well as affect the selection of research material and the phrasing of my research questions. Furthermore, my emphasis on subject matters and subject positions is explained by their relation to discourses, the attention they have attracted in the research fields relevant to my study and the possibilities afforded by my methodological approaches. Thus, my research questions are phrased in the following manner:

### **The Primary Research Question:**

How is female authorship represented in literary interviews with female authors published in the British newspaper *The Guardian* and its Sunday sister paper *The Observer*?

### **Secondary Research Questions:**

- What kind of subject positions do female authors take or are placed into in literary interviews? How are female authors' character and agency described?
- What kind of subject matters are discussed in literary interviews with female authors?

## Structure of the Thesis

After the introduction, the thesis is divided into four chapters each of which has its respective emphasis and purpose. The objective of Chapter 2 is to provide a concise overview of the socio-historical and theoretical thinking that form the basis for my own research problem. The chapter consists of three subchapters with different points of view. Chapter 2.1 briefly introduces how female artists and authors have been perceived in the art world and literary field and how this perception relies on gender difference and discrimination and increasingly on feminist objectives as well. Chapter 2.2 presents media discourse as distinctive practice and process and deliberates its commercial and socio-political meaning for authors. Chapter 2.3 turns to arts journalism as a specific field of practice inside journalism and the literary interview as a unique genre. I do not follow any particular theory or theoretical approach, but broadly aim at understanding how, and slightly why, female authors are represented in a particular way in the art world, journalism and literary interviews. This is why the theory chapters emphasise theoretical frameworks instead of particular theories, socio-historical background instead of particular studies and their findings and influential thought schemes instead of individual thinkers and their every disciple and critic. As my own study can be characterised as cross-disciplinary – combining approaches from literary studies, social and cultural studies and media studies – an exhaustive review of research done on every field would be quite unfeasible in a study of this extent, and, in any case, my thesis is analysis-led.

Chapter 3 resonates both with the preceding theory chapter and the subsequent analysis chapter. Nevertheless, the main purpose is to introduce my research material and the methods and processes of gathering and analysing literary interviews. First, in Chapter 3.1, I will present the British newspaper field, and *The Guardian* and its online culture site as part of that field, as well as the final selection of articles which constitute my research material. Chapter 3.2 continues the objectives of the theory chapter in briefly introducing how subject matters, subject positions and content analysis have been understood and used in social sciences, cultural studies and media

studies. Also, my methodological thinking and the course of analysis are explained at the end of the same chapter. The end of the chapter moves towards analysis, as the overviews of both subject positions and subject matters in the research material will be run through. Even though the analysis concentrates on gendered representations and discourses, the overviews are vital in demonstrating the variety of different pieces in the puzzle that constitutes the literary interview.

Chapter 4 concentrates on analysing the recurrent subject matters and subject positions that are connected with gender. As the subject matters proved slightly more interesting from the perspective of gender, the chapter follows an outline traced out by the subject matters, and insights from the analysis of subject positions will be used to fill in the picture. The chapter also connects my findings with the theoretical and socio-cultural frame of reference, especially with feminist criticism and research done on arts journalism, journalism and media. There are three subchapters in the analysis. Chapter 4.1 discusses female experience from the view point of feminine stereotypes, motherhood and opposing alternatives. The following Chapter 4.2 introduces the female authors as social critics and especially spokespersons for gender equality. Chapter 4.3 somewhat resumes to the subject matters and positions of the previous chapters but approaches them in the context of the art world and literary field, whereas the previous chapters were concerned with society at large. The chapter ends with contemplation of the female authors' status as creative artists.

Chapter 5 brings together my findings and makes the closing conclusions, but it also illustrates the problems and difficulties encountered en route and proposes new directions to be taken in order to acquire even better understanding of the representation and position of female authors in the future.

## 2. Female Authors of the Cultural Field in the Public Sphere

There are four variables in the headline of my theory chapter with which I attempt to understand female authors' standing and agency: *female* as the defining attribute, *authors* as the cultural and social subjects and actors, and *the cultural field* and *the public sphere* as the fields of reference. None of these variables are unequivocal nor applicable as such, and, for example, all of them have attracted feminist criticism. In everyday language, the meaning of the word *writer* or *author* seems quite straightforward: someone whose work is to write, for example, books, poems or stories, or, more generally, a person who has written or created something, such as a book, a film or even a plan.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, taking into consideration all the historical, cultural, political and social meanings and associations attached to it, the concept of an author becomes highly varied, variable and debatable. When the term is attached to the signifier of gender from the binary system dominant in the Western world, the meanings become even more complicated and politically charged. To begin with, it is not even clear what is meant with *female*:

Biologically female persons? Individuals who have been socialized as “feminine”? Does that socialization vary when we understand women as always already raced, classed, and sexualized, and by *contradictory* processes, which introduce differences within every construct of identity ... Does the invocation of “women” announce simply that the category of gender is at work, conceptualized in an “intersectional” model that focuses on the interlocking (not parallel) construction of race, gender, class, and sexuality, in an encounter in which each term is determined and determining? Or perhaps “women” signifies sexual difference as it is figured by psychoanalysis or the critique of phallogentrism, which aligns femininity with the divided subject and invokes it to herald the ruin of any concept of identity or identity-based reading. ... Is {it} a critical hypothesis that is available to any and every [person], including men? (Rooney 2006a, 5–6)

The category, meanings and positions of *the female author*<sup>4</sup> are intertwined with the problems of gender and, moreover, with gender difference and gender discrimination in the art world and literary field. These issues will be further explained in Chapter 2.1.

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<sup>3</sup> “Author” and “Writer”. *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d. Web. 26 Apr 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the thesis, I will use the term *female authors* as a generic term to refer to women who write fiction and the same term with the definite article to refer to the interviewees in the literary interviews of my research material. The choice of words is mainly an attempt to avoid confusion with the writers, i.e. the interviewers, of the literary interviews, but also to highlight the creative individual and occupational aspects of engaging oneself in writing fiction.

The borders of the art world are difficult to define because art and its actors seem to reach their influence to all corners of society. Art is tightly integrated with social reality, politics, economy, religion, culture and many other fields. For example, culture – as the set of customs, traditions and values of a society or community – and art – as the set of processes and products that stimulate thought and emotion in society – are inseparably connected to each other. In art history, cultural studies and social sciences, the entity of art and its actors, processes, products and institutions is often described through the concept of *the cultural field*, and the more specific artistic fields such as *the literary field*. The cultural field, or the field of cultural production, is a concept that derives from the sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, according to which:

Any social formation is structured by way of hierarchically organized series of fields (economic, educational, political, cultural etc.) with its own laws of functioning and relative autonomy but structurally similar with each other. (Johnson 1993, 6)

The structure and organisation of these fields are based on the relations and positions between the actors of the fields, or more precisely the subject positions created and permitted by each field, and their competition on the different interests and resources typical of each field (Bourdieu 1993, 30–31). Furthermore, each individual field is in relation to the other fields, and resources and power transfer between fields (Bourdieu 1993, 39).

Bourdieu sees that the cultural field and the literary field are extraordinary because, in these fields, authority is based on symbolic capital, rather than economic. Symbolic capital depends on the “degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge and recognition” (Johnson 1993, 7). The field of cultural production is not led by mere demand or commission, but chance, possibilities, dominant ideologies, individual strategies, distinctions and taste systems, as well as the structure and organisation of the field play their parts in production, distribution and consumption in the field (Bourdieu 1993, 46). Every agent – individual, group or institutions – in the cultural and literary field takes part in defining,

maintaining and reconstructing both the structure and positions of the field and the symbolic objects, which are called *art* or *literature*, as well as the value of those works of art (ibid., 30, 35).

In general, in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, the cultural field and the understanding of what constitutes art are characterised by diversity, indefiniteness and ambiguity. Contemporary modern and postmodern art is defined by “an enormous richness, complexity, contradictoriness, self-reflectiveness compared to art in previous centuries” (Stangos 1994, 7). In the course of the last centuries, art has moved through various isms towards the apparent freedom and all-inclusiveness of postmodern world view (ibid.). Similarly, literature and literary theory have followed the ideological movements of the cultural field, politics and society. Despite their relative autonomy, the literary and artistic fields are contained within the general field of power, and, because of their relative autonomy and specific principles of hierarchisation, their relation to the economic and political fields are especially fluid and ambiguous (Bourdieu 1993, 37–39). In my thesis, the concepts of the cultural and literary fields are used to refer to the totality of symbolic objects, agents, institutions, processes, structures and relationships from the social conditions of production to social conditions of consumption in these fields.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, I see that, for example, journalism, arts journalism and the public sphere form fields and entities of their own with distinctive pieces, movements and rules as well as relations to other fields.

Consequently, another broad concept that I use in understanding female authors as social actors derives from the German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas. *The public sphere* refers to a public space outside state power where individuals exchange views and knowledge and take part in forming public opinions according to the governing rules of the sphere (Habermas 1991, 27). In a way, the public sphere forms an area inside the Bourdieu’s political field, and it is used for debates on matters of public importance as well as to produce discussion that affects the decision-making processes in society. The most important characteristic of the public sphere is its critical and

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<sup>5</sup> In my thesis, I have adopted the same terminology that Bourdieu uses for the entities of the art world. The terms *the cultural field*, *the field of cultural production* and *the art world* are used interchangeably, whereas *the literary field/world* refers to the specialised section of the art world. In general, the more general and inclusive terms are preferred, because literary authors influence is not restricted only in the literary field.

discursive nature (Outhwaite 1994, 14–16). For example, newspapers, and media in more general sense, are seen as important to the constitution and function of the public sphere, and, in the end, it was the changes in the press that provoked the decline of the public sphere, too (Habermas 1991, 181). For Habermas, the public sphere is linked with the bourgeois society of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Europe and with the ideas of the modern state and civil society (ibid., 17–25). A variety of factors resulted in the eventual disintegration of the public sphere, for example, the growth of a commercial mass media, which lived on and maintained performance and media spectacle and turned critical citizens into passive consumers, and the welfare state, which merged the state with society so thoroughly that the public sphere deteriorated (ibid., 232–235, 247). Later, the public sphere has been criticised for its limitations in terms of class and gender, idealisation of the bourgeois society and individuals' abilities to reach a consensus, as well as pessimistic outlook on postmodern society (Outhwaite 1994, 11). Especially feminist criticism has pointed out that Habermas's categories fail to include women into the public sphere and, more generally, that the public-private split is profoundly based on gender difference (ibid.). On the other hand, Habermas's idea of the potentially emancipatory nature of the lifeworld<sup>6</sup> against the systems of money and power, and how this could serve women's interest, has interested feminists (Brookfield 2005, 317).

In journalism and media studies, tendencies like less-constrained access enabled by new media and new technology, increase in opinion-based writing, emergence of civil journalism and freelance contributors, as well as mediatisation<sup>7</sup> of political life have aroused optimism about the possibility of the revival of the public sphere (Temple 2008, 188–204). However, many social,

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<sup>6</sup> In social sciences and especially in sociology, the concept of *lifeworld* refers to human beings' everyday, lived experience of the world; the concept emphasises the informal, cultural, historical and communicative ways in which the world is experienced (see Habermas 1991).

<sup>7</sup> *Mediatisation* is a concept adopted from contemporary media studies, and it refers to “the meta process by which everyday practices and social relations are historically shaped by mediating technologies and media organizations” (Lundby 2009, x). By definition, media does not only operate between organisations and publics, but actively alter the possibilities of communication by reshaping the relations and forms of social institutions, communities and fields, such as state, government, commerce or the cultural field (ibid.). Lundby argues that compared to the earlier term *mediation*, which is connected with the processes and changes in the modern media itself, mediatisation points to the changes in society and everyday life that are shaped by the modern media and processes of mediation and the increased influence of the media on all spheres of society and social life (ibid., 3–4). The influence of mediatisation is significant, even parallel to the modern, overarching phenomena of individualisation, commercialisation and globalisation (Krotz 2008: qtd. in Lundby 2009, 5).



political and economic constraints on democratic, unrestricted public discussion still exist, and commercially driven and ideologically structured journalism can hardly be seen as a proper public sphere (see van Zoonen 1994; Fairclough 1995). It is not surprising that newspapers have been accused of failing the public sphere, or at least the potential of its existence (Temple 2008, 197–204, 208). Nevertheless, in my thesis, I see that authors’ tendency and desire to engage in discussion of their lives and literary works do not merely rest on literary or commercial objectives, but it is premised on the idea of a potential *cultural* public sphere and the possibility of introducing opinions, stirring discussion and taking part in (public) opinion formation and political decision making – on “the idealization of free and open debate that has policy consequence in a democratic polity” (McGuigan 2005, 427). Chapters 2.2 and 2.3 will examine authors’ position and agency in journalism and the public sphere.

## **2.1. The Gendered Standing of the Female Author**

Traditionally, the Western idea of a creative artist has greatly relied on the Renaissance and Romantic ideas and ideals about individuals, subjectivity and creativity (Chadwick 2007, 67). Female authors and artists have existed at least since the Classical period, but still, in contemporary society, female artists and authors are obliged to confront and deal with these masculine stereotypes of creativity and artistic individuality (Berger 1972, 46–47; Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 19; Parker and Pollock 1981, 96). The stereotypes were born in a particular historical situation and they have undoubtedly changed in time –as has their context and significance – but their legacy and influence are carried through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even into the present. For example, the modernist author Virginia Woolf, who was somewhat haunted by the scarce possibilities, means and prestige afforded to female authors, expresses her concern over the position of female authors in her famous essay “A Room of One’s Own”:

[I]f one was a woman, by a mind which was slightly pulled from the straight, and made to alter its clear vision in deference to external authority. One has only to skim those old forgotten novels and listen to the tone of voice in which they are written to divine that the writer was meeting criticism; she was saying this by way of aggression, or that by way of conciliation. She was admitting that she was ‘only a woman’, or protesting that she was ‘as good as a man’. She met that criticism as her temperament dictated, with docility and diffidence, or with anger and emphasis. It does not matter which it was; she was thinking of something other than the thing itself. (2007, 609)

As the cultural field is largely ruled by aesthetic values that are ultimately negotiated by ideology, the dominant ideologies have governed the place and status of female authors for a long time (Rooney 2006a, 9). The subordinate and marked position of the female author has led to the emergence of specific, “inferior” feminine genres of literature and certain survival strategies, such as apologising, undermining or underlining one’s gender, which women have adopted in order to survive and succeed in the art world (Elliot and Wallace 1994, 70–71; Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 65; Rooney 2006a, 9). On the other hand, female authors have turned to certain forms and genres to challenge the hegemonic masculinist aesthetics, for example, celebrated sentimentality, preoccupation with subjectivity, the intimate form of autobiography and resistant avant-garde – in short, some women have aimed at forming and contributing to *écriture féminine*, to use the term coined by the French feminist Hélène Cixous (Rooney 2006a, 9)

However, rather than trying to create a specific category for women, in the course of the last fifty years, many female artists and authors have intentionally aimed at criticising, revising, deconstructing and reconstructing the patriarchal definitions of women and their roles in society (Chadwick 2007, 345, 378–380). Moreover, some have tried to ignore the meaning of gender altogether and concentrated on material, conceptual and cultural meanings of arts (ibid.). Chadwitz sums up that, even though today the ranks of female artists are not united nor fixed, what female authors still share are the experience of being confronted by the exclusion of the female body from the art world, and the history of theories, strategies and practices aiming at changing the thinking about gender, expanding theoretical knowledge and advancing social equality (2007, 422; on feminist literature and aesthetics: Felski 1989; Cranny-Francis 1990). Postmodern, postcolonial and later feminist theories, which have contradicted all illusions of essentialism or uniformity of

experience among women (Rooney 2006a, 3), problematise the entire generalising definition and concept of the female author – and, not only is the concept of woman fluid but also “authoring” a literary work is problematic as it presupposes identity and intentionality, which are essential parts of a patriarchal myth, according to Peggy Kamuf (1980, 297: qtd. in Rooney 2006a, 6).

What is evident from this short, sweeping history of female artists and authors is the gradual rejection of essentialism, social determinism and attempts to create coherence and unity among the category of women, and a move towards the idea of social constructiveness and performativity of gender and intersectionality of social factors in creating discrimination. It is a reaction against the biased historical, cultural and political thinking and representation of femininity, female subjectivity and women’s positions in society. Feminist criticism and theoretical thinking, explicitly and as a part of more general postmodernist discourse, have had an enormous influence on the positions and stances of female authors and on the processes and practices of the cultural field in general (Chadwick 2007, 13–14, 345, 379–382).

The separate categories for women and female authors have been maintained by essentialism, binary system and opposition of genders, gender difference and generalisation of women’s experience, whereas postmodern feminist criticism has fought to dismantle all these constructions (see hooks 1982; de Lauretis 1987; Butler 1999). Some feminist thinkers, for example aforementioned Gubar, have lamented the loss of a common project as current thinking on gender seems to “offer no guarantee of a ‘common undertaking’” (Rooney 2006a, 13, 16). This means that no united “feminist subject” exists to fight a common enemy in order to accomplish gender equality. Actually, the notion of universal, overarching patriarchy has also been denied (Butler 1999, 6). Instead, current feminist thinking, criticism and art – in collaboration with other contemporary thinking such as postcolonial theory, post-structuralism and queer theory – have been effective in questioning and deconstructing persistent discriminative structures, practices and representations, as well as suggesting alternative ways of looking at and structuring human subjectivity and social reality (Rooney 2006a, 16–18).

What remains debatable is whether female authors write differently from men – not because of essential difference nor from common experience – but as a result of shared, albeit varied, struggle against gender discrimination that produces feminist agency. Rooney refers to “a feminist reader”, which applies to authors as well, who

read[s] to undo previous phallic paradigms of interpretative mastery and to disclose as yet unimagined textual possibilities, possibilities that invalidate our “available paradigms” and leave ambivalence, conflict, and contradiction in place for us to explore. (2006a, 7)

Yet, undoubtedly, the feminist reader or feminist literature is not fixed nor really gender-specific. However, opinions that gender, or even sex, matters do exist. For example, the idea of performativity of gender that derives from Judith Butler’s theory, in which gender is seen as socially constructed, highlights the importance of bodies: “a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body”, “a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through naturalization in the context of a body” (1999, xv). Moreover, influenced by the work of the influential cultural theorist Luce Irigaray, some feminists stress that the awareness we have of our bodies is not a neutral nor purely cognitive, but laden by especially emotional and affective meanings that are individual and social, and often damaging and destructive (Lennon 2010).

For example, Moira Gatens seeks to problematise the ahistorical and theoretical view of gender as fully socially constructed (1996, 8–9). What Gatens argues is that that human subjects are “sexually specific”, but, instead of two fixed significances, a multitude of different corporeal experiences occur as the meanings and significances of human bodies are changing all the time – bodies are contextual, productive and dynamic (1996, 57–58). Gatens wants to understand how these bodies affect people’s experience and how culturally and historically particular kinds of bodies become to perform particular kinds of tasks – and how other bodies are excluded or discriminated against, for instance, female artists and women as political actors (1994, 50, 58). Thus, advancing at least feminist agency, maybe even women’s agency, is desirable and necessary in the cultural field.

According to Foucault, power and domination are not subjective but sustained in and through relations, practices, processes and institutional and representational systems (1976, 92–93). Thus, the supremacy of masculinity, gender difference and devaluation of female authors are above all maintained by the relations, processes and systems of society, the art world, popular culture and literature. The institutionalisation of art and art world, appropriation of critical stances and persistence of legitimised distinctions and dispositions, regardless of the apparent omnivorism and weakening of hierarchisation between high and popular in the postmodern era (Longhurst 2007, 91), are powerful in maintaining the status quo and, consequently, gender difference and discrimination in the art world (Bourdieu 1993, 23; Foster et al. 2004, 42–48; McGuigan 2005, 432). Moreover, the increasing commercialisation and mediatisation of art and literature hardly ease the situation as media has the tendency of reinforcing stereotypes and commercialism extensively uses and benefits from gender difference (Ojajärvi 2004, 256; van Zoonen 1994, 67).

Various feminist critics and theorists have pointed out the persistence of biased representation of women, femininity and gender, as well as the way of constructing women as a spectacle for the *male gaze*<sup>8</sup> (van Zoonen 1994, 67, 87). In the literary field, blatant gender discrimination in publishing, award-giving and reception is still pointed out in recent accounts, assessments and surveys by authors themselves (see Chapter 4.3; Berry 2013; King and Melnick 2014; Griffith 2015). In addition, authors have reacted strongly against inequality, for example, by forming special feminist publishing houses, such as Virago Press, and representatives, such as the American VIDA – Women in Literary Arts or the British PEN’s Women Writers’ Committee, to promote female experience, female authors work and cast light to the inequalities in the field and in society.

Literature itself has been seen as an important outlet to promote equality, and, for example, Barbara Johnson talks about the importance between literature and feminism:

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<sup>8</sup> The notion of *male gaze* was famously coined by the feminist film critic Laura Mulvey to describe the suppressing effect of constructing women as subjects-to-be-looked-at – a practice to which also female spectatorship relies on. Later Mulvey’s ideas have been criticised and developed and the contradictions and possibilities for alternative ways of looking have been proposed. (van Zoonen 1994, 88–94, 103)

[L]iterature can best be understood as the place where impasses can be kept open for examination, where questions can be guarded and not forced into a premature validation of the available paradigms. Literature, that is, is not to be understood as a predetermined set of works but as a mode of cultural work, the work of giving-to-read those impossible contradictions that cannot yet be spoken. (1998, 13)

On the other hand, many feminists have pointed out how the structures and processes of language and discursive systems persistently reproduce and maintain gender difference and discrimination in literature, journalism and society (see van Zoonen 1994; Mills 1997; Moi 2003; Mills and Mullany 2011). In the end, Toril Moi, who in her work *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) maps the history of feminist approaches, does not wish to embrace all the different feminist voices but above all to deconstruct the dichotomous systems and proceed “beyond the opposition feminine/masculine, beyond homosexuality and heterosexuality” (2003, 173) – which is one of the main objectives of contemporary feminist thinking, though with the recognition and inclusion of other social injustices (Radford 1986).

## **2.2. Authors in Media as Public Figures, Spectacles and Commodities**

Similar to the art world and literary field, journalism and more broadly media production form structural and functional fields of their own. For example, Norman Fairclough has deliberated the special nature of the media field and its quintessential practices of producing, reshaping and reproducing discourses. Some of the special properties of media discourse, in comparison to other forms of discourse, have developed because media discourse is affected by properties of mass communication, the economics of media, the politics of media, practices of media text production and consumption and the sociocultural context – and media, in turn, has shaped discourse patterns in these fields (Fairclough 1995, 39, 51–52). In many ways, media discourse both reflects and produces changes in society and culture (ibid.), and, perhaps most importantly, media discourse is between several contradictory extremes, such as public and private, public service and market, and the colloquial and the official (ibid., 63, 66, 71):

[T]he social purposes of journalism, part overt and part covert, are complex and contradictory – the production of descriptions which can be seen as impartial and objective, but also entertainment, social control and legitimation. ... [J]ournalist don't only recount events, they also interpret and explain them, try to get people to see things and to act in certain ways, and aim to entertain. (ibid., 86)

Yet, above all, according to Fairclough, “media texts are sensitive barometers of cultural change which manifest in their heterogeneity and contradictoriness the often tentative, unfinished and messy nature of change” (ibid., 60). For example, Habermas sees that newspapers had an important role in the emergence of the public sphere (1991, 42–43). Even today, journalism's role as an intermediary and a facilitator of dialogue and communication between different social, economic and political actors and institutions is essential, even though commercial pressures, technological changes, editorial aims at efficiency, new intermediary practices and disintegration of the public and audiences are shifting power relations increasingly (Pietilä 2007, 295; Pietilä 2012, 285, 289; Bardoel and Deuze 2001, 98–100; Temple 2008, 173–178).

Nevertheless, access to the arena of media and the public sphere is restricted in many ways. By no means are the institutions, processes or practices of the public sphere or journalism free from gender bias and discrimination – a fact stated already in the introduction. Not only are the representations of women inadequate, biased and distorted in journalism and media, but the institutional structures, processes, conventions and ideals are inherently masculine and patriarchal (van Zoonen 1994, 14–15, 43, 49–65). What is more, to a great extent, the same could be argued about the theories and methodologies of communication studies that have attempted to assess media (ibid., 14–15). Van Zoonen describes media as “technologies of gender, accommodating, modifying, reconstructing and producing, disciplining ... contradictory renditions of sexual difference” (1994, 66). Journalism and the field of media production have gone through enormous changes during the past twenty years. Yet, at least according to Banks and Milestone, the de-traditionalised journalism and cultural economy, marked by individualisation, egalitarianism and mobility of workforce, continue some of the markedly regressive traditional social structures and practices; in particular, the new media sector exhibits some clear continuity with the old economy in

terms of enduring gender inequality and discrimination (2011, 73–74). For example, *The Global Media Monitoring Project* (GMMP), which has since 1995 mapped gender inequalities sustained in and through the news media in more than 100 countries, continues to recognise and report similar problems year after year.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, both the public sphere and political field are marked with similar ideals, practices and structures that abhor women's presence and agency (Outhwaite 1994, 11; Gatens 1996, 50–55).

Journalism and literature share a long history. From the beginning, newspapers and magazines have relied on literary content and provided an outlet for authors and their literary works. Print media has especially featured essays and short stories by authors and used authors as regular contributors of news, essays, causeries, opinion pieces and criticism – actually, many writers were considered both journalists and authors (Canada 2015, 1–23). Also, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, new forms, such as the report and the interview, brought literature to the press and allowed journalists to experiment with the literary form (Masschelein et al. 2014a, 15). On the other hand, authors have used different types of publications and media outlets to experiment with writing and to bring forward their literary works and social and political views (Canada 2015, 1–23). Especially art and literary criticism,<sup>10</sup> also referred as review, and essay writing have proved as diverse, accessible channels for authors to express their thoughts and opinions on literature, art and society, and journalism has used artists and authors as mediators of the art world's inner discourses and debates and commentators of current events (ibid.; Rodden 2001, 5). Even today, the connection between authors and newspapers, or even more generally between the art world and journalism, is beneficial for both parties – the actors of the cultural field are increasingly dependent on the visibility provided by media and, on the other hand, newspapers rely more and more on arts and

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<sup>9</sup> “The Global Media Monitoring Project 2015 Reports.” *Who Makes the News*. Agility, n.d. Web. 30 Mar 2016.

<sup>10</sup> In general, the term *literary criticism* embraces all study, evaluation, and interpretation of literature from individual literary works to their historical, cultural and social contexts. Here, with literary criticism, I refer more specifically to the tradition of reviewing and discussing authors' literary works in newspapers, magazines and other media; not the more theoretical critical debate inside the literary field and literary research, albeit the discussions are connected



entertainment coverage in order to grow and retain the number of their readers (Masschelein et al. 2014a, 3; Szántó et al. 2004, 12).

Traditionally, the art world has been progressive in bringing forward new ideas and deconstructing old ones (Stangos 1994, 8–9); even Habermas regarded the literary public sphere as preliminary to the actual public sphere (1991, 29–33). Thus, it is not surprising that authors have enjoyed high prestige as public figures and intellectuals (McGuigan 2005, 430). However, since the beginning of the last century, authors' public persona has been increasingly affected by two tendencies – commercialisation and mediatisation of the art world – which still shape the status and practice of authors in the art world and society. Interestingly, these tendencies have the potential of both undermining and strengthening authors' position as public figures.

Halfway through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, critical cultural theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer coined the term *culture industry*, which alludes to the increasing commercialisation, standardisation and mass-production of the cultural production and which is in contrast to “authentic culture” (2002, 94–97). Later on, the theory has been criticised for its homogenising, pessimistic, deterministic and elitist views, but it does offer insight into how culture, literary texts as well as authors are produced and marketed as commodities to be circulated and consumed (Ampuja 2001, 28–29, 34–35). Gradually, commercialism, mass-standardisation and the appropriation of critical ideological movements into the elitist sphere of legitimised art have weakened the critical stance of authors and artists (McGuigan 2005, 432). The change is noted and illustrated by a French researcher as well:

However, as public figures, writers were no longer revered as the “great men of letters”. Rather, a new type of writer, *the public intellectual* ... gradually replaced the older type but enjoyed a somewhat lower status (Carbonnel 2004, 46: qtd. in Masschelein et al. 2014a, 15; emphasis added).

On the other hand, McGuigan argues that in the late-modern era, the cultural public sphere is not only concerned with rational, critical thinking, but

[i]t includes the various channels and circuits of mass-popular culture and entertainment, the routinely mediated aesthetic and emotional reflections on how we live and imagine the good life. The concept of a cultural public sphere refers to the articulation of politics, public and personal, as a contested terrain through affective (aesthetic and emotional) modes of communication. (2005, 435)

In addition to commercialism, media researchers talk about mediatisation of the art world, which, in this context, means that the publicity provided by the media has become essential to the actors of the art world in order to gain symbolic capital in the cultural field (Lundby 2009, 6–7). In other words, authors’ success, both literary and commercial, is increasingly determined by visibility and media exposure (Masschelein et al. 2014a, 3). James F. English and John Frow even refer to “celebrity novelists”, whose public personas have become objects of special fascination and scrutiny over their literary works – a type of media spectacles (2006, 39). Obviously, this is not a new phenomenon, but it has intensified lately because of, for instance, American-style capitalism, intensified media conglomeration and virile brand management, but most of all because of “increasing complexity in the way that literary value is produced and circulated” in the ever more complicated and undefined literary field (ibid., 41–44).

Consequently, mediatisation of the art world also means that the actors of the art world potentially become visible, even influential, actors and debaters of the public sphere. Mediatisation of the cultural field affords the actors of the field more prominence, prestige and power in social, economic and political fields, too (English and Frow 2006, 49, 52, 55; Bourdieu 1991, 37–39). However, capital gained in the “restricted” field of production is valued differently from the capital of the “general” field, and vice versa, and they do not convert to authority and power in a similar way or extent (ibid.). Nevertheless, Bourdieu sees that the struggles fought in the cultural and literary fields are connected with the more wide-ranging debates of what is factual and valuable in society (1993, 41). For example, Maarit Jaakkola, who has extensively studied arts journalism in Finland and mapped the field in Europe, says that “specialized sections of arts, culture and entertainment, established around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, have become an influential area for discussion and debate in the cultural and partly political public sphere” (2015, 26).

### 2.3. Changes in Arts Journalism and the Emerging Literary Interview

My thesis concentrates on an area of journalism called *arts journalism*<sup>11</sup> and a genre called *the literary interview*.<sup>12</sup> Arts journalism is sometimes characterised as an intermediary field between cultural production and reception, and an intermediate form between the aesthetic, evaluative discourse of the art world and the journalistic discourse of democratic, objective mass communication (Jaakkola 2015, 45, 112). Arts journalism has commercial, communicative, pedagogical and even aesthetic objectives (ibid., 74, 93).

Traditionally, arts journalism has mainly constituted of aesthetic discussion of art, and especially of art criticism. However, lately, arts journalism has been moving away from the traditional, aesthetically-oriented discourse to a more journalistic discourse. The new policy emphasises, for example, popular genres of culture over high culture, feature and news genres over traditional art criticism, and personalities and social and political contexts of art over aesthetic qualities of individual works of art. The goals and ideals of the journalistic discourse rest upon the traditional ideals of journalism, such as democracy and objectivity, but also upon commercial goals of catering for and attracting as wide an audience as possible. According to Jaakkola, the new journalistic discourse calls for adopting a different perception of culture and different ways of producing and processing information than previously accustomed in arts journalism. The changes have been different, and to different degree, depending on national and productional contexts, but some distinctive parallels exist. (Jaakkola 2015, 19–21, 48–49, 111)

By and large, Szántó et al., who have researched the American arts journalism, conclude that art criticism still holds its position on the culture pages, but journalistic genres, such as news, interviews and features, are gaining ground “as a strategic priority” (Szántó et al. 2004, 12–13).

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<sup>11</sup> The preferred terminology for journalism concentrating on arts, culture and leisure differs between cultural and historical contexts. In the English speaking countries, the term *arts journalism* is usually used, even though the scope of the term often extends to various forms of cultural life, leisure, lifestyle and even food and travel. (Szántó et al. 2004).

<sup>12</sup> In the English language context, the term *literary interview* is used, and I understand it similarly to Masschelein et al. as “personal interviews in both popular and more specialized literary media, such as are given by, or in some cases also conducted by, a literary author, that have some bearing on literature, its writing, or its experience” (2014a, 3).

Compared to reviews of some of the other art forms, the literature review has an especially strong economic importance and manages a little better than the rest, at least in the US (Tyndall 2004, 29). For example, on *The Guardian*'s books site, roughly half of the articles are still reviews and, with each review, there is usually a direct link to the newspaper's own bookstore. Yet, the change is evident on *The Guardian*'s site, too, as a variety of different more journalistic, popular, commercial and entertaining types of articles, such as commentaries, blogposts, news articles, suggestions listings, quizzes and chats, gain ground.

The gradual shift of art journalism towards the journalistic discourse ultimately leads to popularisation and, some might argue, commercialisation of the culture section. Yet, in regard to my thesis, the most important consequence of the process is that the contents of arts journalism increasingly concentrate on reporting and discussing the economic, social and political aspects of arts rather than merely critiquing their aesthetic merits (Szántó et al. 2004, 13). Interestingly, the process has also been described as "feminisation" of the culture section, as the traditional aesthetic, opinion-based discourse is connected with masculinity (Ruoho and Torkkola 2010, 59). Thus, the emerging journalistic discourse is seen as more feminine because of its emphasis on popular culture, use of "soft" news genres and commercial ethos (ibid.).

Regardless of this shift away from aesthetic discussion and somewhat derogatory prejudice attached to it, the recent changes in arts journalism have the potential of reinforcing authors' position as public speakers. Consequently, interview-based features about the personalities of the art world have recently gained prominence in newspapers and other media (Masschelein et al. 2014a, 2). Nevertheless, by no means, is the literary interview the only genre that features authors' speech. For example, commentaries and features about authors, news articles that are based on authors' public statements, speeches or discussions, and especially opinion based articles *by* authors, such as commentaries, editorials, columns and blogposts, offer diverse and interesting possibilities for authors to express their opinions. In general, arts journalism has a strong tradition of authors and other actors of the art world contributing features, reviews and commentaries on various topics and

with different styles to newspapers – typically, they are labelled as “specialists with aesthetic orientation” (Jaakkola 2015, 111).

In my opinion, the literary interview is especially interesting from the viewpoint of social and cultural studies; it gives the floor to the actors of the cultural field to address subject matters outside works of art and aesthetic debates. Jaakkola, who draws the background for her dissertation from Scandinavian, Anglo-American and Western European contexts, explains that, at least in media studies, arts journalism has been a neglected area of research, and especially arts journalism as a forum of societal debate has been researched fairly little (2015, 48). When arts journalism has been studied, it has usually been approached from the viewpoint of arts and individual artistic fields, aesthetics and cultural mediation (ibid.). Research has primarily focused on the aesthetic substance or form and especially on art criticism (ibid.), whereas the journalistic genres have attracted much less attention (Jaakkola 2015, 48; Rodden 2001, 15; Masschelein et al. 2014a, 5).

The literary interview has perhaps escaped attention and research because of its flux form, dialogic nature and associations with popular culture (Rodden 2001, 1–3, 20). A similar suggestion is done by Guillaume Willem, who speculates that the literary interview has not attracted much attention from media or literary research because the genre is not connected with “autonomous”, “auratic” writing, but more with “commercial, unauthentic”, “industrial literature for the market” (2016). According to and judging from the bibliography of articles and studies composed by the research group Masschelein et al. (2014a, 11–12, 14; 2014b), a great deal of research on the literary interview has concentrated on the representation and reconstruction of the author’s personality, interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, interviews published in *The Paris Review*,<sup>13</sup> and, more often than not, on specific case studies in historical and national contexts, in theoretical terms or about particular authors – rather than pursued consistent research on the genre of the literary interview.

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<sup>13</sup> *The Paris Review* is a still-running English language literary magazine that publishes in-depth interviews with established authors. Especially in the English speaking world, the magazine’s literary interviews, which typically aim at becoming literary works themselves, are often taken as the standard of the literary interview (Masschelein et al. 2014a, 10).

Even when interview itself is a relatively young form in a journalistic sense, it has already become so prevalent that some researchers claim that we live in an “interview society” (Masschelein et al. 2014a, 2). Still, the literary interview is often considered an “emerging genre” (Rodden 2001, 4). Despite the fact that the first formal literary interview was published already in 1884 in the *Petit Journal* in France and the first English literary interview, with Jules Verne, in *Strand Magazine* in 1895, the genre truly surfaced as a subtype of the journalistic interview with the foundation of *The Paris Review* in 1953 (Rodden 2001, 1–4; Masschelein et al. 2014a, 14). The emergence of the genre can be situated within the framework of democratisation, which some also call decline, of literature in the press, which has contributed to the popularity of the author as well as the loss of the author’s auratic position (Masschelein et al. 2014a, 13).

The genre has wrestled with pressures of commercialism, associations with entertainment and difficulties to define its form and purpose – both in the journalistic and literary fields (Rodden 2001, 3–6; Masschelein et al. 2014a, 17). Especially the literary world has been wary of its influence to the “purity” of literary genius, and many authors have eschewed literary interviews (Masschelein et al. 2014a, 15). The acceptance and attitude differ between literary contexts, but, according to Masschelein et al., in the English tradition, the interview is, above all, considered “a product of the (American) fascination with celebrity culture and gossip” (ibid.). Technological changes and changing journalistic practices have also influenced the process and form of the interview enormously (Masschelein et al. 2014a, 7–8).

Masschelein et al. consider the literary interview a hybrid genre, which makes it a compelling research subject for reasons relevant to my research questions, too:

First, it belongs to both the media and the literary domains. Second, its authorship is not only divided between interviewee and interviewer but also affected by editing and publishing interventions. Third, it mixes features of an oral interaction and of a written or edited communication. As a result, the literary interview as an object of study raises important questions about notions like *genre*, *authorship*, *authorial positioning*, and *discourse at large*. (2014a, 1–2; emphasis added)

Rodden describes the literary interview an epitome of a “postmodern genre”: “characterized by its appropriation of other genres, both high and popular, by its longing for a both/and situation rather

than one of either/or” (Perloff 1989, 8: qtd. in Rodden 2001, 20). A similar observation is done by Fairclough on media texts in general: the way in which media texts are between public and private, public service and the market, combinations of the colloquial and the official, and based on interrelations between different institutions and discourses makes them highly unstable and variable as texts, and thus important and interesting objects of research (1995, 63–66, 71).

According to Rodden, the primary purpose of the literary interview is the representation and construction of authors’ personalities (2001, 6). Unlike reviews, which usually concentrate on the recent literary works by authors, literary interviews typically highlight authors as active subjects and aim at giving readers a sense of the authors’ personalities (Jaakkola 2015, 120; Rodden 2001, 6). This is clear in the discursive, dialogic form of the interview and the extensive use of direct quotations from authors. Rodden considers authors either “traditionalist”, “raconteurs” or “advertisers”, depending whether they primarily downplay, display or actively promote their personalities and subject matters meaningful for them in their interviews. Commercialism and celebrity culture have the tendency of highlighting celebrity interviews, and, according to Rodden, the advertiser has become increasingly frequent in literary interviews since the 1960s. (Rodden 2001, 6–13)

According to Masschelein et al. the meaning of the literary interview is more versatile. They argue that the literary interview

fulfils diverse functions: it operates for commercial (self-)promotion; it invites a writer to comment on recent events (not necessarily literary); it can be autobiographical, confessional, or biographical; and it can also serve a documentary purpose when concerned with literary life and writing habits. (2014a, 18)

In addition to these, Masschelein et al. contemplate on the literary status of the literary interview, which they consider to be highly dependent on the form, process, historical, cultural and productional context and symbolic status given to it in the literary field (ibid.). In spite of its suggested authenticity and spontaneity, Masschelein et al. believe that the interview form is actually quite stereotypical and authors’ personalities are constructed much in the same way as fictional

characters (2014a, 34). However, because the literary interview is a product of media and celebrity culture, some might argue that the personas produced in interviews (and other media forms as well) are merely secondary, or reflections, of the “real” performances of the authors’ personas in literary works (English and Frow 2006, 52). Nevertheless, it is clear that the literary interview fulfils certain functions which affect both its contents and form.

Above all, the format of the literary interview is decided by the place and type of publication, and the interviewer and editor play an enormous part in the representation of the author as they are often in charge of the form, subject matters and final wordings (Masschelein et al. 2014a, 21–25) – this is true to the extent that the literary interview is said to undermine classical, auratic and autonomous, authorship (ibid., 21). Some interview types have become common, such as the “visit to the great author’s home” that foregrounds intimacy and ordinariness, or the topical interview that concentrates on the author’s art of fiction and foregrounds artistry and authorship (ibid., 27). Not much research is done on the form and topoi of the literary interview, but Masschelein et al. believe that under variations and heterogeneous practices lies “the narrative form of the finished report and the literary or aesthetic qualities of the written interview ... [that bring the literary interview] close to existing literary genres, like the autobiography, biography, report, essay, monologue or conversation, and even fiction” (2014a, 40).

The literary interview has not escaped criticism. Its history between two fields and their conflicting and changing conventions, desires and pressures produce new tension all the time. Lately, even the death of the literary interview has been predicted, caused by the lack of substance and decline of its uniqueness and spontaneity. For example, the British author Pico Iyer blames the precarious state of the literary interview on the use of the Internet and search engines which highlight and circulate the same information and anecdotes (2006). Such practice overtakes the actual research of literary works and reciprocal conversation between two experts of the literary field (ibid.). Iyer also connects the problem to celebrity culture that makes authors promotable



commodities, even above their literary works (ibid.). On the other hand, Sarah Fay complains about the general oversupply of interviews in “the age of the interview”, when not only authors of talent, success and distinction are interviewed but every “run-of-the-mill author” as well, and in a similar manner “but to no purpose and little effect” (2012). Also, Rodden’s perception that more and more authors use the platform provided by the literary interview merely to advertise themselves as commodities and celebrities is connected with the fear of the decline (2001, 13). Undoubtedly, behind these remarks lie disagreements about the value of high and popular culture, about values and distinctions in the contemporary art world and journalism, and about the position and purpose of the author in the art world and society.

The question of authors’ gender and its influence arises in relation to the literary interview, too – although not in research but at least in articles and reactions by authors and journalists.

Masschelein et al. only vaguely mention that

“the implied author”, of other public appearances of that author, and of existing authorial postures that circulate in the media ... will influence the course of the interview and its reception, either confirming or correcting prevalent images and stereotypes. Also, as the dynamics of the interview is determined by the interaction between writer and interviewer, status, *gender*, and level of familiarity must be taken into account. (2014a, 36; emphasis added)

In general, on literary pages, female authors are less likely to be reviewed, published and interviewed, despite the recent increases over the last year, according to a review by VIDA.<sup>1415</sup>

Furthermore, Lorraine Berry points out, based on experiences of contemporary female authors, that questions posed at female authors are often personal and even verge on demeaning and derogatory, and, even if male authors were asked similar questions, the effect would be different because of different societal expectations:

[P]ersonal questions directed at a male writer don’t dispute his right to be a writer ... [only question] his intellect. But the women I heard from have been challenged in ways that implicate their bodies – through overt references to children, marriages, or attractiveness as potential dates. (Berry 2013)

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<sup>14</sup> The VIDA Count is based on newspapers and magazines published in the United States: “The VIDA Count.” *VIDA: Women in Literary Arts*. VIDA: Women in Literary Arts, n.d. Web. 28 Apr 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Flood, Alison. “Female Authors Make Inroads at Major Publications – Survey.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 31 Mar 2016. Web. 30 Apr 2016.

The discrimination of female authors and dismissal of women from literary interviews have produced both comical articles on “How to Interview a Woman Writer”<sup>16</sup> as well as more substantial work, such as Donna Marie Perry’s *Backtalk: Women Writers Speak Out: Interviews* (2013) or *The Paris Review*’s article series “Women Writers at Work”, that aim at adding to and challenging the representation of female authors in the literary interviews of the traditional media. In essence, this is the same objective that my thesis and analysis have.

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<sup>16</sup> Devaney, Beulah Maud. “How to Interview a Woman Writer.” *The Toast*. Manderley LLC, 13 Jan 2015. Web. 14 May 2016.

### **3. Reading Newspapers and Analysing Text**

My thesis concentrates on the representation of female authors in a selection of literary interviews drawn from the British daily newspaper *The Guardian* and its Sunday paper *The Observer*. The meanings constructed from a newspaper article are subject to various actors and factors from journalists to readers and from structures and processes of production to the contexts of consumption. The British cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall's theoretical thinking on how media texts are produced, disseminated and interpreted has been highly influential in explaining how the roles of the producer and the receiver and their social, historical and cultural contexts and histories influence the meanings of messages (Pantti 2004, 230–231). In Hall's theorising, the politics behind media representations arise to centre stage – media institutions, newspapers and media contents do not only reflect the power relations of the media field but actively reconstruct them (ibid., 243; also Hall 2006). According to van Zoonen, most analyses of media texts aim at evaluating and criticising the ways in which media representations reflect and relate to society, and they raise the question of how media performs its mediating role in society (1994, 68). Feminist studies of media are usually based on the assumption that there is some kind of discrimination, bias or “distortion” present in the media field and its output (ibid., 30, 68). Cultural studies emphasises interdisciplinary research, social, cultural and historical contexts and everyday life and individual experiences – this broad view of the world and meanings produced in it is the premise on which my methodological thinking is founded. In this chapter I will explain and justify the process of my research, both selecting and gathering the material and analysing it.

#### **3.1. The British Newspaper Field and Research Material from *The Guardian***

The British newspaper is over 400 years old, and regular newspapers have been published since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the United Kingdom, newspapers are generally dealt into two distinct categories:

the more serious and distinguished newspapers referred as *broadsheets*,<sup>17</sup> or *the quality press*, which concentrate on news coverage, political reporting and current issues, and the newspapers called *tabloids*, which emphasise human interest stories and popular and celebrity culture. *The Guardian*, which was established in 1821 as a local newspaper in the Manchester area and was known as *The Manchester Guardian* until 1959,<sup>18</sup> falls into the first category. In addition to their stance on reporting, the British newspapers vary greatly on their political affiliations, and traditionally they are politically conscious and offer strong endorsement to their political allies but “but reserve the right to criticise or change allegiance”.<sup>19</sup> The British newspaper field is also characterised by variation of ownership and background organisations of the newspapers, from commercially-led international conglomerates to (more) ideologically-led private trusts. Also, the strong standing and significance of the world’s oldest public service broadcaster *The British Broadcasting Corporation* (BBC) immensely influences and shapes not only the British but also worldwide media field. (Temple 2008, 1–4, 25, 87–90)

My research material consists of 52 articles that are based on interviews with female authors and published in 2015 in the British daily newspaper *The Guardian* and its Sunday stablemate *The Observer*. The research material is drawn from *The Guardian*’s online site *theguardian.com*.<sup>20</sup> My reasons for selecting *The Guardian* and its online version as the source of my research material are various, ranging from the social, political and cultural importance of the newspaper to the layout and structure of their webpage. I will elaborate on some of the whys and wherefores next. First of all, *The Guardian* is one of the most prominent newspapers in the UK in terms of its history, circulation and social, political, cultural and journalistic importance (Temple 2008, 88–90). *The Guardian*’s sister papers include *The Observer*, a British Sunday paper, and *The*

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<sup>17</sup> Nowadays the term *broadsheet* refers rather to the contents and historical meaning of the newspapers than their actual format, as many newspapers, for instance *The Guardian*, formerly published in the broadsheet format have switched over to the tabloid or the slightly bigger Berliner (Temple 2008, 88).

<sup>18</sup> “The Scott Trust: Values and History.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 26 Jul 2015. Web. 30 Apr 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Figures on political views of the readers and newspapers in the United Kingdom in Ipsos MORI: “Voting by Newspaper Readership 1992–2010.” *Ipsos MORI*. Ipsos MORI, 2016. Web. 24 Mar 2016.

<sup>20</sup> The international site is chosen because my method of collecting the research material fails to differentiate between articles from the national version and the two international versions, *Guardian Australia* and *Guardian US*.

*Guardian Weekly*, an international newspaper edition, as well as an online version *theguardian.com*, which also contains two international websites, *Guardian Australia* and *Guardian US*, with their own editorial staff. *The Guardian* is part of Guardian Media Group whose sole owner is The Scott Trust which was founded in 1936 “to secure the financial and editorial independence of *The Guardian* in perpetuity and to safeguard the journalistic freedom and liberal values of *The Guardian* free from commercial or political interference”, and any profit the trust makes is reinvested in journalism according to the trust’s principles.<sup>21</sup>

In May 2015, the newspaper’s daily paper form *The Guardian* had an average daily circulation of 178,758 and the Sunday paper *The Observer* had a circulation of 202,824<sup>22</sup>. The circulation numbers leave *The Guardian* far behind most sensational tabloid format newspapers but close in numbers with the other newspapers that were originally published in the broadsheet format, such as *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times* and *The Independent*. Even though *The Guardian*’s paper form has a fairly moderate daily circulation, its online edition *theguardian.co.uk* is one of three most popular English-language newspaper websites in the world. For example, in 2014, it had over 42.6 million unique readers per day, making it the fifth most visited online newspaper in the world just behind *dailymail.co.uk* and followed by *nytimes.com*.<sup>23</sup>

Generally, *The Guardian* is considered to lean towards liberal and left-wing opinions, and it attracts more young readers than any other quality (Temple 2008, 89). The paper’s sympathies and support towards certain political ideas and actors are usually clearly stated by the editorial staff and numerous contributors.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, according to polls between 2001 and 2010, most of *The Guardian*’s readers are either Liberal Democrats or Labour Party voters.<sup>25</sup> However, *The Guardian*

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<sup>21</sup> “The Scott Trust: Values and History.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 26 Jul 2015. Web. 30 Apr 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Circulation statistics: Turvill, William. “National Newspaper Circulations, May 2015: Mail on Sunday Overtakes Sun on Sunday, Times Remains only Growing Title.” *Press Gazette*. Progressive Media International, 5 Jun 2015. Web. 14 May 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Sweeney, Mark. “The Guardian Overtakes New York Times in ComScore Traffic Figures.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 21 Oct 2014. 15 Jan 2016.

<sup>24</sup> For example: “General Election 2010: The Liberal Moment Has Come.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 1 May 2010. Web. 30 Apr 2016.; “The Guardian View: Britain Needs a New Direction, Britain Needs Labour Editorial.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 1 May 2015. Web. 15 Jan 2016.

<sup>25</sup> “Voting by Newspaper Readership 1992–2010.” *Ipsos MORI*. Ipsos MORI, 2016. Web. 24 Mar 2016.

has no foreign owner to call the tune, the stance is not exclusively dictated by the editor, and there even seems to be some moderate sway in the political affiliation of the newspaper. For most issues, there is no clear editorial guideline, and one of the main principles of the newspaper is: “The voice of opponents no less than that of friends has a right to be heard.”<sup>26</sup> As part of their objective for balanced reporting, newspapers strive to bring forward opposing views too, but the political stance of the staff, regular contributors and readers may have an influence on the content of a newspaper, for example, what issues are discussed and from what viewpoint. *The Guardian* has received many awards for its journalism, for example, the National Newspaper of the Year several times and in 2014 it shared the Pulitzer Prize for public service reporting with *The Washington Post*.<sup>2728</sup>

One of the reasons behind the decision to draw my research data from the online version is the continual popularity of online newspapers (Szántó et al. 2004, 12). As seen from the circulation numbers of the paper form and respectively visits on the website, most of *The Guardian*’s readers are online users, and since 2011 the newspaper has embraced “digital-first” strategy, which means taking advantage of the possibilities offered by the digital environment, continual stream of news, and an “‘open’ digital philosophy in which it embrac[es] contributions from beyond the ranks of its own journalists”.<sup>29</sup> In addition to its significance, the online version *theguardian.com* has a very comprehensive structure with headings and subheadings that lead the reader to the culture site and desired content. In the paper version, literary interviews are not as easily accessible as they are spread across the newspaper and its various supplements. Even compared with the websites of other newspapers, such as *The New York Times* or *The Telegraph*, the structure and layout of *The Guardian*’s website seem most easily accessible for readers who want to find interviews with authors – this is one important reason for settling on *theguardian.com*.

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<sup>26</sup> “The Scott Trust: Values and History.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 26 Jul 2015. Web. 30 Apr 2016.

<sup>27</sup> *The Press Awards*. Society of Editors, 2016. Web. 30 Jan 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Somaiya, Ravi. “Pulitzer Prizes Awarded for Coverage of N.S.A. Secrets and Boston Bombing.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times Company, 14 Apr 2014. Web. 14 May 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Sabbagh, Dan. “Guardian and Observer to Adopt ‘Digital-first’ Strategy.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 16 Jun 2011. Web. 15 Jan 2016.

A wide variety of different art forms, mediums and cultural topics are featured on *The Guardian's* culture site. There are separate headings for film, music, games, TV and radio, art and design, theatre and performing arts, classical music and literature on the site. The extent and variety of content is not easily grasped, but something about the scale reveals the fact that up to 20 different types of articles are being published per day on fiction or poetry alone. In 2008, *The Guardian* reformed and extended its culture site, which, for example, on the book site meant that: "We'll be ramping up our news coverage, maintaining our hugely popular books blog, and continuing to cover the literary world from every angle."<sup>30</sup> Now, the literature site features a variety of different article types, for instance, reviews, features, interviews, commentaries, blogposts, news articles, obituaries, tips, links and suggestions listings, quizzes, "top" and "best of" listings, webchats, extracts and short stories, "open thread" conversations with the readers and podcasts of different types.

An abundance of interviews are published on the site. A regular reader of the site finds all the interviews with authors on the culture site under the subheading *People*. However, a technical problem concerning my study was that the site only displays some 20 to 30 most recent articles, even when *The Guardian's* online archives date as far back as 1990s. Moreover, under the same heading, there are other types of feature articles, such as commentaries, recommendations and obituaries, as well as interviews with people other than authors who are connected with the literary field. From the headings in the articles, it is also clear that many of the interviews are originally published in different sections of the newspaper.

### **Female Authors' Interviews from 2015 Pose Possibilities and Problems**

My interest in literary interviews with female authors has already been somewhat explained earlier, but in short: the gender discrimination in the cultural field and journalism, the increasing number and importance of interviews on the culture site, the ever-growing interest in the lives of artists and

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<sup>30</sup> Needham, Alex. "Welcome to the New Culture Site." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 22 Jul 2008. Web. 15 Jan 2016.

authors by the readers, and the need of the publishing and marketing sectors to highlight individual personalities of the art world. However, concentrating on female authors' interviews posed a series of problems. First of all, from the beginning, the many meanings of the word *female* became problematic in the selection process of the research material. Basically, in most cases, I made the distinction between female and male authors based on their given names. This means that the choice relies on the authors' biological sex, because I cannot know what gender identity the authors embrace themselves. However, I do not wish to undermine the importance of social constructiveness of gender. Also, in spite of relying on two gender-specific categories, the intention is not to suggest essentialism, promote dichotomy of genders or rule out differences in experience between members of groups.

Secondly, problems with classifying emerged because the boundaries between different types of newspaper articles are obscure, and many hybrid texts exist. Deciding on what constitutes an article type called the literary interview is not straightforward, as many news articles, features and reviews are also partly based on interviews and the literary interview itself is a hybrid genre (Masschelein et al. 2014a, 1–2). Furthermore, it is typical that an author's press release, blogpost, social media usage, public speech or panel discussion is used as background for a feature and a news article; and, more often than not, the source is not clearly stated making it difficult to know whether the author has actually been interviewed by the newspaper for this specific purpose. Also, in *The Guardian*, there seems to be no consensus on which articles are marked with the keyword *interview* and which with *feature*, but similar articles, even identical in structure, are sometimes called interviews and sometimes features. Still, articles with keywords were included in my research material.

A third problem concerned the nature of interviews. Typically, interviews highlight well-known authors, newcomers, award-winners and critically-acclaimed authors. Also, minorities and rarities and authors writing on special genres or topics might be overly represented, for example, because of journalism's objectives for balanced content and equality and meeting the wishes and



needs of the readers and the market. For example, certain genres such as thriller, crime and science fiction seemed to be well represented during my research period. This might be spurred by the recent success of these genres and their female authors – a fact that was repeatedly stated in the newspaper’s own news and feature articles in 2015.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the winners of notable literary awards are usually featured within a short period after the win. *The Guardian* also features many relatively unknown authors, for example, as part of their interview series “Meet the Author”. Based on *The Guardian*’s political and social views, one would assume that minority questions were taken into account in the selection of interviewees; at least issues of gender, ethnicity and social class in relation to literature are discussed regularly on the pages of *The Guardian*.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the relations between high culture and popular culture and fiction and non-fiction are topics that clearly interest the contributors of the newspaper.<sup>33</sup>

The year 2015 was chosen because temporal closeness, and, because trimming down online archives is a fairly common practice in journalism, it is not certain that all articles are stored after a couple of years’ time. Furthermore, I did not include articles from several or different years, because I am not interested in any potential change in the depiction of female authors, but want to examine the situation at present. There are some consequences in concentrating on contents from one particular year. The contents of literary journalism greatly depend on major literary awards and their winners, new book releases and publications of anticipated works, nature of critically-acclaimed and commercially successful works, anniversaries and deaths of notable authors, annually varying regular content and contributors, editorial decisions about annual themes, as well as wider social, political and economic context.

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<sup>31</sup> For example: “2014: The Year when Science Fiction and Fantasy Woke Up to Diversity.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 2 Jan 2015. Web. 15 Jan 2016; “Why So Many Thriller, Crime and Science Fiction Authors?” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 3 Jan 2015. Web. 15 Jan 2016; Mullan, John. “The Triumph of Fantasy Fiction.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 3 Apr 2015. Web. 30 Apr 2016.

<sup>32</sup> For example: Flood, Alison. “Books about women less likely to win prizes, study finds.” *The Guardian*, 1 Jun 2015; Enjeti, Anjali. “Finding Minority Writers Isn’t ‘Racial Nepotism’. It’s the Cure for Bigotry.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 9 Sep 2015. Web. 15 Jan 2016.

<sup>33</sup> For example: Jaffe, Meredith. “Middlebrow? What’s So Shameful about Writing a Book and Hoping It Sells?” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 5 Nov 2015. Web. 30 Apr 2016; Dyer, Geoff et al. “‘Based on a True Story’: The Fine Line Between Fact and Fiction.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 6 Dec 2015. Web. 15 Apr 2016.

However, none of these problems with literary interviews as research material are insurmountable, especially when they are acknowledged and, when necessary, taken into account in the analysis. In the end, the most serious problem turned out to be finding and collecting the research material. Next, I will elaborate on this in relation to my final research material and describe the research process and explain my reasoning behind narrowing down the material.

### **From a Stream of Articles to a Hand-Picked Few**

My original idea was to study all interviews from 2015 with female authors whose primary writing language is English. Unfortunately, the section where literary interviews are featured only carries the most recent articles. Nevertheless, with the help of keywords at the end of each article, it is possible to obtain articles that date back years. As most literary interviews on the site include the keywords *fiction* or *poetry*, regardless of the literary genre or form of writing the author-in-question is connected with, I went through all the articles from 2015 marked with those keywords. Searching the database with keywords means that all articles with the topics are included, regardless of the section in which they are originally published. Also, the archive does not separate British articles from the ones from the American or Australian versions. Nevertheless, in the context of my study, I do not see this as a problem because there is overlap in the literary cultures of these countries anyway. What is more, not all articles were included, since, when a large number of articles existed per day, only some were presented according to the website's inner logic. Still, my search revealed almost 200 articles of these two types in the website's online archive. Roughly a third of these were interviews.

I made many exclusions based on quantity, content, technical problems and the point of view of my thesis. I excluded articles that are written about a female author without her direct contribution to the article, as well as articles in which only a small part of the article is based on an interview. I also left out interviews with foreign authors outside English speaking nations. However,

I did not want to concentrate only on British authors because of *The Guardian's*, and especially the online version's, international nature. After all, a great number of articles are about authors who come outside the British Isles but are part of the same cultural heritage. Online content that is not based on the article form, such as conversations, webchats and podcasts, was left out because of technical and interpretative reasons. For the sake of narrowing down, I decided to leave out articles that consist of tips, suggestions and recommendations. This means that the interview series "On My Radar" is also left out because of its resemblance to other "Top" and "Best of" listings. Also, I did not include interviews with more than one author. Usually, in interviews of this type, one author is only able to comment on one particular topic or to give a recommendation of some sort. Because of a fixed topic and a huge number of interviews, I decided to leave out the series with children's literature authors "Children's Books: Author Q&As", too.

After studying the remaining interviews, it was clear that a number of recurring series of interviews featured in the material, some of which were published by the culture site of the newspaper and some of which were published by other sites but linked on the culture site because of their subject matter. On the other hand, some of the interviews are not part of any specific series of interviews. In 2015, the culture site had four series of interviews of their own: "A Life in...", "Meet the Author", "Children's Books: Author Q&As", and "On My Radar", of which the last two were already omitted. The series "A Life in..." features authors and other actors of the art world. The articles have no specific topic, but the idea is to describe the interviewee's experiences connected with his or her occupation. "Meet the Author" introduces authors, some of whom have written their first novels and some of whom are well-known, established authors. In this series, the interview typically begins with a reference to the author's work, but then continues to various directions and topics. However, "Meet the Author" always has the same Q&A structure. Including interviews under these headings seemed relevant because they are the culture site's own titles. In 2015, 14 "A Life in..." interviews and seven "Meet the Author" interviews were relevant to my study.

In addition to the culture site's own series, my search with the keywords generated 38 interviews with female authors that are not part of the aforementioned series. These are interviews with female authors that were originally published in a different section of the online version or on the paper version or its supplements. A great number of articles were published in the Sunday paper *The Observer*. In total, there are 18 interviews in the research material that were originally part of a series in another part of the newspaper. These are presented in Table 1:

Table 1 The Interview Series outside the Culture Section

Section	Series	Description	Number of interviews
<b>The Observer</b>	(no name)	Feature interviews in the Sunday paper	9
<b>The Observer</b>	The New Review Q&A	Interviews with authors whose literary works have recently been reviewed	5
<b>Lifestyle</b>	My Family Values	Public figures describe their family values that have shaped them and their careers	1
<b>World</b>	Stories of 2015	Interviews with people who made headlines in 2015 or were closely involved in the year's big stories	1
<b>Lifestyle</b>	Lunch with...	Intimate, long interviews with various people on different topics	1
<b>(not specified)</b>	Saturday Interview	No specific topics, published on Saturdays	1

In addition to the series, my search found 16 individual interviews, 15 of which were published on the culture site and one in the lifestyle section. Most of these are long feature interviews that discuss authors' lives and work from various viewpoints. They often feature authors who have recently won a literary award or who are in the public eye for some other reason. My final research material consists of interviews published in the series "Meet the Author" (7) and "A Life in..." (11), and of a selection of individual interviews (16) and interviews from series outside the culture section (18). Altogether my research material consists of 52 literary interviews with 48 female authors published on the online site of *The Guardian* and *The Observer* in 2015. Not all of them were written in the arts journalistic tradition, but they are featured on the culture site of *The Guardian* – an online newspaper with dozens of millions daily readers.

My method of sampling can be described as selective. This means that not all interviews were selected nor did I pick them randomly, but according to my own criteria and method of

selection, described above. There was also an amount of randomness in the selection. Not all interviews were included because my search method omitted a certain portion of the interviews according to a criterion unknown to me. However, I did not limit my material to any specific literary genre or make a distinction between popular culture and high culture; nor did I address questions of ethnicity, social standing or sexual orientation in my sampling. For example, Alasuutari notes that collecting a broad and comprehensive body of material is preferable in order to have a rich corpus against which hypotheses can be generated and tested (1995, 172). I deliberately sought diversity but also wanted the material to be representative of the content of the culture site. In my analysis, the qualitative method of coding and counting the subject positions and subject matters also involves a quantitative phase. A selective, purposive method of sampling is not uncommon in qualitative research, and, when the shortages of the material are acknowledged, it does not prevent generalisation, in principle (Alasuutari 1995, 146–148). That being said, qualitative research usually rather aims at understanding the phenomenon at hand and at contextual subjective accuracy than generality (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, the extent to which research findings and conclusions from the selective research material can be applied to female authors or to literary interviews with them in general has to be assessed carefully.

### **3.2. Qualitative Content Analysis and an Overview of the Interviews**

My analysis is based on a qualitative content analysis of the female authors' subject positions and subject matters. Content analysis is often employed in media studies to assess large quantities of media output and compare its validity in relation to reality (van Zoonen 1994, 68). Nevertheless, content analysis can prove problematic because it often focuses on mere textual data, gives precedence to manifest meanings at the expense of latent meanings, associations and forms, presumes frequent characteristics as valid indications of meaning and disregards the actual media experience of producers and audiences (van Zoonen 1994, 73). Nevertheless, the method is often

used to present a general impression of the social phenomenon at hand – here, the representation of female authors – and, according to van Zoonen, with careful interpretation and “a solid theoretical framework, content analysis can shed light on social and cultural matters of representation” (ibid.).

My content analysis focuses on the subject matters and subject positions of female authors in literary interviews. Clearly these two categories are connected: subject positions given or taken usually relate to the subject matters at hand. Consequently, in my analysis process, analysing subject positions and subject matters are not separate stages but interrelated parts of the same thought and research process. The concept of the subject position is not straightforward: positions are manifold, fluid, imperfect and connected with power relations. According to the French philosopher Louis Althusser, ideologies invite people to take certain subject positions, but, more recently, it is seen that subject positions are not given nor taken freely, but they are produced in socio-cultural processes and relations. Thus, human subjects have no stable identities, but are made of countless fragmentary and contradictory subject positions that are constructed and gain their meanings in relation to other subject positions. These subject positions are historic, contextual, situational and rhetorically articulated. They vary from fleeting positions “here and now” to social positions, such as gender, racial, sexual or occupational identity, which are seen as more permanent.

Usually in postmodern and post-structural approaches, the analysis stretches to macro-contexts, and the construction and use of subject positions are examined in relation to society’s socio-cultural, political and economic history and present. Notably, feminist criticism has pointed out how human beings are constructed as gendered subjects. (Törrönen 2000, 244–246)

Accordingly, for example, feminist content analysis has typically concentrated on the visibility, roles, practice and psychological and physical features of women (and men) to find out how they are portrayed in media (van Zoonen 1994, 69). Similar deliberation could be conducted on subject matters, which are often analysed in media studies and newspaper research as well. As such, neither subject matters nor (most) subject positions are inherently gender-specific, but, still, they are often perceived as such, which makes them interesting objects of research.

## **Thematic Analysis: Categorise, Conceptualise and Interpret**

My content analysis did not follow any specific methodological approach, but I did follow some basic guidelines of qualitative content analysis. My research method embraced both *thematic analysis* and its primary process called *coding*. Basically, thematic analysis means reading through (textual) data and pinpointing, examining and recording focal themes that recur throughout material, and coding refers to the practice of going through material and marking each relevant segment with an appropriate label or description (Alasuutari 1995, 67). The idea is to make the material more comprehensible by highlighting segments with similar topics. Nevertheless, this is only the first step of analysis. For example, Ronkainen et al. (2011, 124) divide the research process into three steps:

1. Divide the text into speech acts and categorise and organise them.
2. Analyse and conceptualise them in relation to one another and in the light of your theory.
3. Interpret – try to make your own analytical insights and disengage yourself from the theory.

The second step means that I organised my own short descriptions of the subject positions and subject matters into a matrix, and set out to find common features between them. I categorised them under representative topics and umbrella categories. Finally, in the analysis chapter, I set my findings against the theoretical frame of reference, suggested reasons for recurring issues and possible exclusions, and contemplated on the worth of my findings.

Content analysis seemingly relies on counting specific entities, but, in the end, descriptions and their categorisations are interpretations and simplifications of the original material formulated by the researcher and based on the theoretical frame of reference (Alasuutari 1995, 67–68). Even though classifying the research material in a matrix, colour-coding similar subject matters and positions and counting their frequency of occurrence formed a significant part of my analysis method, the numeric data is not prioritised in my analysis. In fact, in qualitative analysis, matrix and the method of counting are often used as mere tools to arrange the research material and the researcher's perceptions of the material (Alasuutari 1995, 192–193). Also, the numeric data is not

emphasised because the borderlines of my categories are by no means definite and the authors' say on the subject matters or positions seems sometimes questionable. For example, a subject matter might be discussed in length but the author might still deny its relevance to her or her work in the end. Furthermore, various intervening factors influence the selection of subject matters and even subject positions – from editorial decisions and commercial reasons to the social position and cultural prominence of the author.

Even though the research data should be approached as objectively as possible, it is certain that the researcher's previous knowledge, experience and hypotheses will guide her reading to some extent (Ronkainen et al. 2011, 123). My previous knowledge of the cultural field, literature, arts journalism and feminist thinking guided my reading of the authors' statements and opinions as well. Thus, my aim was not to look at the research material as it would have appeared to an average reader, but, instead, I attempted to see the thinking behind the authors' subject positions and subject matters, discuss the choices made and even debate with the interviewees and the interviewers during the analysis. Because of my selective and critical stance towards the material, I describe my method as *critical* content analysis.

I also followed Ronkainen et al.'s (2011, 23) three step model for representing the findings of my content analysis:

1. An overview of the research material
2. A focus on analytical nodes and
3. Any contradictory views, exceptional cases or meaningful details.

In this chapter, I will provide a brief overview of all the subject positions and subject matters recognised in my research material to give a general view of the research material and to explain the logic of my classification. I will also describe which of them will be discussed in the analysis and justify my choices based on the overall material and my understanding of significant parallels and exceptions in the material. Some of the reasons why certain issues become interesting from the perspective of gender are explained as well. Thus, the analysis chapter is able concentrate on the subject positions and subject matter that appear to be gender-related, such as female experience and



women's standing in society and in the literary world. All direct quotations from the research material are typed in italics and marked with the author's name and the online publication date of the article.

### **Social Positions and Character Descriptions in Shaping Authors' Subjectivity**

Human subjects are constructed of countless fragmentary, contradictory subject positions, some of which are more permanent and some of which only flicker in the moment "here and now" (Törrönen 2000, 246). Discovering and discerning all subject positions that the female authors take or are placed into<sup>34</sup> in the course of the interviews would require rigorous study of every utterance (and their meanings, associations and relations) in the interviews. My aim is merely to understand some of the ways in which female authors exist as subjects and as a group in the cultural field and in society – whether there is consistency in subject positions and characterisation between female authors, and how gender contributes to all this.

My analysis of the subject positions was twofold: First, I searched for the more traditional and permanent subject positions, such as ideological stance, social roles, occupational identities and social identities relating to gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and religion. These subject positions are illustrated in Table 2 on the next page. However, the subject positions did not fully succeed in describing the authors' being and agency in society – and even less in the cultural field, which seemed to disappear almost completely. In order to describe the female authors' stance and status in the cultural field and in society in a more versatile way, I created another category that illustrates the representations of the female authors' character. These descriptions are gathered in the word cloud in Table 3 on the following page as well.

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<sup>34</sup> In my analysis, I will use the term *embody* to denote both the practice of taking and being placed into a subject position.

Table 2 The Female Authors' Social Positions



Table 3 Descriptions of the Female Authors' Character



The social position and characterisation are represented in word clouds in order to draw attention to the vast variety of positions and differences between them.<sup>35</sup> There is clearly overlap in the positions and descriptions, part of which will be explained below and part of which merely serves as an apt example of the complex and fragmental nature of subject positions. Not every faint indication of a subject position or character trait was included, but only the ones that become significant in the interviews or characteristic of the interviewees. The grounds for inclusion were slightly different every time, for example, the subject position of a daughter, which regularly arises from biographical details, was only included when it is important in the interview as a whole.

Descriptions in both categories derive from textual and rhetoric expressions in the interviews. Some of them are the exact expressions used by the interviewer or the interviewee, but more often I have created an expression to describe the author's character or the position she embodies. For example, in the tables above, there are quite many different expressions that describe the female authors' political agency, because my aim is to draw attention to the diversity of the authors' involvement. For instance, the authors might direct their political activity towards human rights, environmental issues or gender equality. The more general terms refer to the authors who have more than one cause to defend, and the more specific terms refer to the authors with a precise social on their agenda. The means and degree of involvement are illustrated by the continuum from supporters to fierce political agitators. However, and above all, the titles tell about the stance that the authors take in these particular interviews. In real life or other contexts, the authors might take totally different subject positions. Moreover, the titles describe my initial understanding of the authors' political involvement based on just one interview.

In general, the positions and descriptions of character are not only products of my interpretation, but they relate to various social, cultural and theoretical ways of understanding and categorising social positions and describing subjects, for example, as a member of a family unit or

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<sup>35</sup> In the word clouds, the frequency of positions and portrayals is represented with the colour and size of the font. The most common positions featured dozens of times in the material, whereas the rarer ones only once or twice.

through binary opposition. Moreover, every position and description originates in a specific context for a rhetoric purpose (Törrönen 2000, 246, 248), both of which are greatly influenced by the tradition of the literary interview. Most importantly, there is an interplay between the subject positions and subject matters. For example, a female author engaging in social criticism in a literary interview takes the role of a social critic and, and on the other hand, an author who has a strong position as a social and cultural critic in society is likely to bring out critical topics in her literary interview, too.

### **Variation of Subject Matters inside the Outline of the Literary Interview**

The subject matters covered in the interviews vary from biographical and bibliographical information to emotional accounts of personal life. On the other hand, the interviews feature reflection on stylistic choices made in writing and voluble political criticism of racism and sexism in modern society. In general, most of the interviews seem to draw from the same subject matters that the authors' literary works deal with. In other words, what the authors say or are asked about is greatly influenced by the themes, plots and characters of their literary works. Alternatively, the interviews also draw from the authors' life experience subject matters that have cultural, social or political importance. Some of the authors are well-known social critics and advocates of gender equality, human rights and minority issues, and, thus, their interviews often concentrate on their political work as well. In addition to these, there are several "stock" subject matters that are usually covered in the interviews. These include references to the authors' character, biography and bibliography. In addition, as the interviewees are often recently published authors, nominees for literary awards or winners of prestigious prizes, the themes and merits of the recently published works are also covered. Furthermore, the authors' everyday lives and their work methods and creative processes seem to be subjects of interest. (see also Masschelein et al. 2014a)

Despite the apparent variation, when examined more closely, all the subject matters discussed in the interviews can be classified into the following categories in Table 4:

Table 4 Subject Matters in the Interviews with Female Authors

Category	Examples of Subject Matters
<b>Appearance and Character</b>	Feminine characteristics, in relation to work and public image
<b>Biography</b>	Parents, childhood, education, marriage, previous work experience <b>Biography in relation to the author's literary work:</b> Family history, family life, motherhood, personalities, locations, loss/bereavement/death
<b>Bibliography</b>	Notable works, awards and nominations, financial successes, works that relate to the author's current work <b>Recently published or upcoming work:</b> Awards and nominations, plot, themes, structure, characters
<b>Art of Writing</b>	Research, writing process, character creation, structure of novel, use of language, stylistic choices and techniques, particularities of serial and genre writing, challenges of autobiographical writing
<b>Experience of Being an Author</b>	Beginning of writing career, finding one's field, success, pressures of success, other work, financial pressures, lack of confidence, solitude and outsidership, encounters with readers <b>Connections:</b> Personal relationships with other authors, inspirations and favourite authors, statements of gratitude to other authors, critical acclaim received from others
<b>Personal Experience</b>	Family life, marriage, relation to family members, mental health, bullying, alcoholism, depression
<b>Human Experience and Lifeworld</b>	Relationships, outsidership, spirituality, survival, ethics, poverty, loneliness, adolescence, violence, death <b>Female experience:</b> Motherhood and childbearing, women-women relationships, female sexuality, female aggression, motherhood and career, menopause, body image, domestic life <b>Male experience:</b> Male roles in society, institutional abuse, black men and violence
<b>Politics and Social Criticism</b>	Civil rights, mental health system, depression, unemployment, racism and prejudice, racial profiling, heteronormativity, class differences, financial crisis, environmental criticism, social differences and education, social change, author's political views, elections <b>Gender politics:</b> Depiction of female body and femininity in society, female roles in society, sexual violence against women, gendered experience, interrelations of sexism and ageism in society, domestic violence
<b>Literary World and Cultural Field</b>	Creativity, high literature vs popular literature, genre hierarchy, inequality in publishing (racism, ageism, sexism), depiction of women in literature, commercialism in arts

The first four primarily deal with the authors' personas and their literary work, whereas the latter five open up towards the lifeworld and society. The first four categories are quite straightforward. They include descriptions of the authors' *appearance and character*, *biography* and *bibliography* and the different methods, practices and choices made in creating literary works, which is labelled *art of writing*. Both biography and bibliography have subcategories – *biography in relation to the author's literary work* and *recently published or upcoming work* – that differ in their subject matters, and they seemed worth setting apart because of their popularity in introducing the authors and their work. The category *experience of being an author* consists of references to the careers and everyday practices of professional writers.

The latter five are a little more difficult to describe and differentiate. *Personal experience* refers to detailed discussions of the authors' experiences that relate to shared human experience or social issues, such as adolescence or poverty, but do not directly connect the authors with other people or wider social debates. Under *human experience and lifeworld*, I have categorised discussions of the lifeworld experiences that are considered shared. They are dealt from a general point of view, with no clear intention of engaging into social or political debate around these topics. *Female and male experiences*<sup>36</sup> approach human experience from gender-specific points of view. However, the distinction between female, male and human experience is merely practical; it is dictated by my research problem, but it also results from the huge difference in volume between these categories. For social criticism and political opinions and debates, I created a separate category *politics and social criticism*, inside of which I have also included the frequently discussed subject matter of *gender politics*. Politics and social issues, and especially issues of gender inequality, extensively appear in the category named *literary world and cultural field*, too. However, for the purposes of further analysis, I have classified all discussions of the cultural field under the same heading.

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<sup>36</sup> The categories for *human*, *female* and *male experience* stem from the authors' way of including other people in their discussion of the lifeworld. In spite of having two binary categories and one shared, the aim is not to promote gender difference, but to use the categories as mere tools for the analysis.

Although these categories succeed in describing the contents of the interviews fairly well, by no means are the categories comparable to each other in terms of frequency and coverage. Neither are the categories fully consistent, but many similarities and some overlap between the categories and the topics classified inside them exist. As, at first glance, there seems to be a great deal of overlap between the categories and differences in importance, I will first briefly explain the logic of my classification. Then, I will reason why some of the categories are not discussed in an in-depth manner. Even though it is important to form an understanding of the vast variety of subject matters in the interviews, my analysis chapter mainly concentrates on gender-specific subject matters. Yet, the categorisation that I made helped me to organise the varied research material into a more manageable form and enabled me to focus on subject matters relevant to my study.

Basically, there are four different types of categories in Table 4. One of the main principles of my classification was the scope of the subject matter: whether the discussion of the subject matter refers to an author and her personal life, or whether it extends to the author's literary work and professional position, or to the literary world and cultural field or to the experience of human beings and society at large. The scope is also the principle that separates human experience, personal experience and female and male experience from one another – meaning whether the authors only refer to members of one gender or to people in general. Following my classification, for example, violence can be found in all four categories depending on whether the author talks about violence as personal, female, male or human experience. Violence can also end up in the category of politics and social issues if it is taken up as a social or political issue. On the other hand, a description of violence in the author's literary work I have classified under bibliography if the discussion does not move outside the literary work and its reality.

Practically every interview in the research material includes some type of description of the author's bibliography, biography, recently published or upcoming work and author's relation to other authors and influential actors in the art world and society. Especially common are descriptions of the authors' most successful works, financial success and awards or critical acclaim they have

received for their work. Further, it is fairly common that the authors' literary works are linked with their personal lives. This is certainly one of the most common, but also highly debatable, ways of explaining authors' work (English and Frow 2006, 52). Discussion of the art of writing, such as stylistic choices, use of language and writing process, also features in most interviews. Examples of the previous categories turn up basically in every interview. They adhere to some of the common practices of introducing and discussing an author or an artist and his or her artistic work in the genre of the literary interview (Masschelein et al. 2014a). That is why I do not discuss these categories in an in-depth manner but only draw examples from them when fitting. However, I am not suggesting that these categories would contain less gender-specific discourse. For example, it would be interesting to map the authors' relations to other authors and influential people more thoroughly. However, in reality, many of the same contents are repeated in the latter categories because the authors' biographies and bibliographies have a great influence on the course of the interviews. Also, there is an important editorial difference between the first six categories and the latter five: the former seem to rely more on the writers' observations, research and speech than on the authors' interviews, whereas the latter draw more from the interviews themselves and, for example, include more direct quotations from the authors' speech. This, too, justifies the decision to concentrate more on latter five categories.

Both the subject matters and subject positions present in the literary interviews are intertwined and influenced by the prevailing systems of discourses that circulate in society. Thus, I see no point in discussing them separately, but I will discuss the gender-specific aspects of them together in the following Chapter 4. Nevertheless, from the perspective of gender-related discourse, my findings concerning the subject matters proved slightly more interesting. Thus, the subject matters will provide an outline for the discussion in the next chapter, and the subject positions will be deliberated based on them.



## 4. Life, Society and Literature from Female Perspective

In the following analysis chapters, I will concentrate on the authors' speech that deals with the lifeworld experience, politics and social issues and the questions of the literary world and cultural field. Female perspective is definitely well-represented in the subject matters of these categories. The interviews often deal with subject matters such as female experience, gender politics in society, and depiction and status of women in the arts. Also, the categories about the authors' appearance and character and the experience of being an author contain a few fascinating findings and interrelations that I will address. In comparison with the aforementioned subject matters, a few odd references to male experience and the manner of discussing human experience also become subjects of interest. As far as the subject positions are concerned, the most significant subject positions, such as mother, wife and social critic, and the descriptions of character, especially outsider and observer and the binary opposition of ordinary and extraordinary, are discussed. I will contemplate on some of the reasons why these subject positions are so characteristic of female authors in particular, and how the positions are used to tie the female authors to traditional gender roles and, on the other hand, possibly used by the authors in resistant ways to empower themselves and women.

### 4.1. Feminine Female Experiences and Opposing Stances

In the interviews with female authors, human experience is predominantly represented from the perspective of women.<sup>37</sup> First of all, there are extremely many female voices present in the

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<sup>37</sup> In the headline of this chapter, I have the words *feminine* and *female*, and the word *feminist* is suggested, too, by the "opposing stances". These are words that have been used differently and debated in feminist criticism (Moi 1989, 116; Rooney 2006b, 73–74). Basically, Moi perceives *feminism* as a political position, *female* as a matter of biology, and *feminine* as culturally defined characteristics (1989, 116). *Feminine* is characterised especially by the masculinist, patriarchal "narrative[s] of femininity", but its meaning changes all the time because femininity is essentially ideological (as is masculinity, but with a different effect) (Mills 1997, 87–88; Rooney 2006b, 73–74). Thus, with *feminine*, I refer to the stereotypical representations, positions and practices connected with women, albeit keeping in mind that they are changing all the time. Whereas, with *female*, I refer to experience by women in general, and, here, *woman* is defined as socially constructed, not merely biological.

interviews. In addition to the interviewees, almost all the interviewers are women, too – only five interviewers out of thirty-two are men. The most obvious explanation for the predominance of female perspective lies in the fact that people observe the world from their own point of view, and even authors are often seen to write from their own experience (Berger 1972, 8–9; English and Frow 2006, 52). Also, some of the prevalent genres among female authors, such as the domestic novel, foreground particular experiences, such as motherhood, and these genres are well-presented in the research material (about the domestic and autobiographical novel and female authors: see Cranny-Francis 1990; Anderson 2006; Rooney 2006a). Nevertheless, I do not believe that this fully accounts for the fact that nearly half of the interviews address subject matters that seem to relate exclusively to women's experience. Subject matters such as childbearing, motherhood, women-women relationships, marriage and domestic life, female aggression, female sexuality, menopause and women's experience of their bodies and body image appear in the interviews. These are not mere references but the subject matters are discussed frequently and in length. Especially motherhood is highlighted in many interviews. Often the discussion moves towards social criticism of gender roles and gender inequality. This is the case especially when topics such as women's roles, depiction of women and violence against women are addressed. In this chapter, on one hand, I will concentrate on the depictions of feminine experiences, especially motherhood but also creativity and corporeal experience more generally, and, on the other hand, on the authors' struggle against these feminine stereotypes.

### **Mothers and Wives Above All**

By far, the most common subject positions that the female authors embody are those of a mother and a wife. In most of the interviews, the authors' offspring, or lack of offspring, is at least mentioned. Only less than ten in the total of 52 escape this, and in about third of the interviews the authors' own children become much more than mere asides or references. Similarly, roughly half of

the interviews mention the female authors' husbands and partners, and more than half of the articles feature the partner in a more or less substantial role. Not once in the interviews being a mother or a wife remains a mere biographical detail, such as "*She lives in Washington DC with her husband Ian McCredie, a former MI6 agent, and their children*" (Katherine Heiny, 15 Feb 2015), but one or the other always attracts additional attention – in Heiny's case, her husband – and usually even the lack of either one is addressed.

The female authors tend to embrace the subject positions of a mother and a wife for several reasons. Typically, in literary interviews, the authors' biographical details include references to authors' past and current family members. In addition, explaining the authors' biography is especially extensive in the interview series "A Life in...", whose point of view is the authors' lives. Furthermore, as the domestic fiction genre is well-represented in the research material, the authors' personal relationships to their real-life family members might become subjects of interest. After all, following the Romantic model of authorship, fiction is still frequently seen to involve a degree of autobiography and reveal the inner life of authors (English and Frow 2006, 52), and authors are considered to be able to provide personal, unique insights into their works (Masschelein et al. 2014a, 3, 13). On the other hand, from a feminist point of view, autobiographical writing has had an important role in raising awareness of female experience, and feminist writers and their readers have used the once-belittled form as "a privileged space for women to discover new forms of subjectivity" (Anderson 2006, 119). The interviews also draw attention to the authors' everyday life experience, especially in connection to their writing process, other employment and social criticism. These all are subject matters that potentially bring out the mother or wife in the authors' identity.

Quite often the authors themselves adopt the domestic subject positions, or at least it is made to appear that way in the interviews. In several instances, the authors directly refer to themselves as mothers or wives. However, these references usually have a legitimate basis on the discussions at hand, as motherhood and domestic roles are extremely common subject matters. Nevertheless, at times, the interviewers seem to bring out the authors' domestic roles in unexpected,

unnecessary and even gender-politically questionable connections. For example, in the case of Heiny, the interviewer asks her: “*There are lots of stories about adultery. Does your husband ever get worried?*” Similarly, sometimes the reasoning behind the interviewers’ inserts about the authors’ children, such as “*(she also has a daughter in her 20s from her first marriage)*” (Meera Syal, 17 May 2015), is unclear. The insistence on traditional gender roles is sometimes more structural, for example, in the interview of the vocally feminist Erica Jong, whose extraordinary personal life is narrated through her four marriages and relationships with her husbands. In my opinion, the writers of the articles have a tendency to unnecessarily highlight the authors’ positions as mothers and partners. These and other editorial choices will be further discussed in Chapter 4.2. What I also find rather peculiar is that the female authors’ artistic collaboration with their husbands or partners is often mentioned, even when the representation of the female authors as artists is full of contradictions – a point I will return to at the end of Chapter 4.3.

### **Restrictive and Productive Motherhood and Contradictory Emphases on the Body**

Motherhood is the most common subject matter connected with female experience that is discussed in the interviews, and one of the most common in general, too. As mentioned, most of the female authors embody the subject position of a mother. Furthermore, in about fifth of the interviews, motherhood is discussed in more detail, as more than a mere biographical detail or personal experience. It is raised, for instance, to illustrate female experience in a more general way or the conditions behind the female authors’ literary work, career, working methods, creativity or interest in social criticism. Motherhood also affects other subject matters in the interviews. In addition to the direct references, there are other female experiences that are connected with motherhood in the interviews, for example, women-women relationships and domestic life. Especially the mother-daughter relationship receives much attention as the authors often refer to their own daughters, deal with the mother-daughter relationships of their literary works, or reflect on the lives that women of

the next generation will lead. Similarly, discussions of domestic life suggest motherhood; although, they are usually fused with other subject matters, too, for example, middle-class lifestyle, life in rural village communities, traditional gender roles and social ills. It seems that motherhood is perceived as the experience that women and female authors share together and as groups of people. Traditionally, motherhood is undoubtedly one of the most characteristic experiences connected with femininity and women's lives.

In the interviews, especially the tradition of the domestic novel gives rise to deliberations of the female authors' own experience of motherhood, and often autobiographical writing is assumed:

*The state of motherhood provides the novel with its emotional core; Hall wrestles intently with the questions it raises, and describes the bodily ordeal of pregnancy and birth in such visceral detail that I took it for granted that this, too, was drawn directly from life. But it turns out she wasn't pregnant when she began the book; in a rare case of life mirroring art, that came later. (Sarah Hall, 28 Mar 2015)*

Like in the previous quote, it is not uncommon that the interviewer is the one who creates the connections between the author's work and her experience as a mother. In some cases, the authors do write autobiographically and aim at making statements about motherhood in society:

*"I had to be quite brave to tackle that material," Simpson says now. "People weren't talking about it like that at the time; there was a conspiracy of silence, and it felt very scary to speak up. But it had to be done. Women were having babies and just disappearing, and no one was saying anything." While the cultural conversation around motherhood has broadened vastly in the years since, Simpson's view on the wider position of women in society remains gloomy. ... On motherhood itself, she is "shocked things haven't moved on more," but relieved that "at least all this is no longer a taboo subject. I think the current great unspoken subject for couples is probably: whose job is more important?" (Helen Simpson, 24 Oct 2015)*

How to combine a career with motherhood and what kind of influence they have on one another are questions that come up constantly in the interviews:

*"They're ferocious experiences, parental love and trying to make really serious art, the intensity required for both is very high"; in the early years especially, they can be "at war a little bit". In a sense Offill sees mothering and writing as similar: requiring total attention, alertness. When writing's going well "your antennae are up". When her daughter was little: "There was just a siren going off in my head: 'She could die she could die! Keep your eyes on her! Don't let your mind wander!'" (Jenny Offill, 28, Feb 2015)*

Clearly, the topic of combining motherhood and work has been important to the feminist cause, especially at the early stages, but what the authors are also referring to is a more metaphysical association, namely between motherhood and creativity. Even more specifically, childbearing and writing a literary work are connected or juxtaposed in the interviews:

*“When I finish one book I never think, ‘Oh, there’s another one.’ It takes a little while to refill. ... The “refilling” between books takes nearly a year. “I always said if you asked a woman who’s just given birth, ‘When are you going to have your next baby?’ she’d say, ‘Whaaat?’” (Anne Tyler, 15 Feb 2015)*

*So, looking back, which was harder to conceive – the novel or the person? She laughs. “The person, right? It would almost be an insult to say otherwise. But ‘harder’ in the best sense. A person demands more of all of you, a book you can...” ... My love for my son just destroys me. I can barely even talk about it. Whereas my love for my book? I’m just proud I finished it.” (Miranda July, 8 Feb 2015)*

Exploring the possibilities of female creativity has been a common topic among feminist thinkers and female artists, and linking motherhood and creativity is one of the most traditional alternatives. Taking female anatomy as the model for female creativity resonates with biological determinism and essentialism, against which many feminist have strongly reacted from the beginning. (Friedman 1987, 49; Chadwick 2007, 358; Butler 1999, 16)

Traditionally, in the Western context, intellectual artistic creativity have been associated with masculinity and masculine attributes (Parker and Pollock 1981, 83), whereas women’s creativity has been reduced to reproduction and linked to the natural act of giving birth and even referred to as “vaginal or womb art” (Chadwick 2007, 306–309, 359). This conforms to the patriarchal stereotype that women are closer to nature than men, and it creates a separate category for women’s art (ibid.; Gatens 1996, 23). Indeed, time after time, this stereotype has been disputed by feminist and postmodern thinking, and differences in creativity and perception of male and female artists have rather been attributed to invariable social differences, prejudice and unequal opportunities (Chadwick 2007, 8–10) – the same factors that create disparity between the individuals of the female authors’ group and the category of women as well (Rooney 2006b, 82). Nevertheless, the traditional stereotypes seem to live on in the literary interviews. The corporeal and innate quality that is often connected with women’s creativity is present in Jenny Offill and Anne

Tyler's quotes above, but it is probably best illustrated by the following quote from the American author Miranda July:

*"I guess the one other detail I would add is that I was pregnant when writing this... I was more in my body than I ever had been. Then I was nursing so I was in about nine different hormonally altered states as I was writing – as interior a book as this is, my body demanded to be in it."* (Miranda July, 8 Feb 2015)

So persistent is this stereotype that, for example, in another context, Lauren Groff has said that she already knows to expect and rebut it in interviews: "I've managed the questions in different ways, most recently by preempting the question about the alliance between my body and my work very early in the interview" (Berry 2013). On a more general note, other persistent stereotypes about creativity also appear in the interviews, for example, that of creativity originating from despair, isolation and otherness:

*Is there something in her that thrives on an embattled, outsider status? It seems unarguable that painful life experience has fuelled her creatively. "Part of change is very painful and very risky, but it is the only possible route I think to those new forms of expression. I'm very pleased that I have found, for now anyway, a new vein of creativity."* (Rachel Cusk, 3 Oct 2015)

As stated before, the bodily, or corporeal, experience of motherhood is connected with representations of female creativity, but insistence and emphasis on corporeality also connects with more general and contemporary discussion on gender. For example, Butler refers to "bodies that matter" and Gatens sees that human subjects are "sexually specific" and that socially constructed gender fails to acknowledge the "qualitative difference" in lived experience – how bodily experience and understanding of the body in relation to other bodies affect experience, that is (1996, 30, 57–58). Gatens thinks that it is important to understand how female and male bodies are historically and culturally situated, imagined and lived, which also means acknowledging the importance of corporeal experience of human bodies (ibid., 14). After all, proposing that bodies are entirely neutral can quite easily turn into "masculinisation" of the female body, as masculine is often seen as the default (ibid., 17). For example, hooks maintains that fading out corporeality serves and reproduces the rational, intellectual ideology of the dominant class, race and gender in the Western context (1994, 139). This new significance of the body in understanding female

experience and historically and culturally specific meanings of femininity might partly explain the female authors' many references to corporeal experiences.

Secondly, Gatens' insistence that it is important to study the imaginary, feminine bodies, which are different from but connected to the actual, situated and lived bodies of women, might explain why the female authors keep on reconstructing variations of the traditional feminine stereotypes in their literature and their interviews – perhaps in order to deconstruct these stereotypes. For example, Friedman notes that women's use of the childbearing metaphor “demonstrates not only a ‘marked’ discourse distinct from phallogocentric male use of the same metaphor but also a subversive inscription of women's (pro)creativity” (1987, 51). Furthermore, describing the corporeal experience of an active female body might serve as a means to reclaim the female body from the (male) gaze – the tradition of voyeuristic pleasure of female bodies, which is discussed by many feminist authors and theorists, for example, by van Zoonen in relation to popular culture, media and journalism (1994, 87–88). After all, although media is effective in producing and maintaining corporeal norms – frames that define what is considered normal and natural for each gender, as perceived by de Lauretis (Kyrölä 2006, 157) – the actors – here, for example, interviewers, interviewees and readers alike – are all active to reject, mediate and transform stereotypes and subject positions (Moody 2006, 176). Imagining an active, subversive female body seems especially relevant when Miranda July describes the bodily experience of female aggression.

At first sight, concentrating on motherhood and domestic experience might suggest that the authors are willingly conforming to traditionally feminine roles and subject matters. Nevertheless, there is evidence that the authors are conscious of their viewpoint and find these subject matters worth the constant contemplation:

*“There is such a thing as feeling as you go through life and I write about it. I am not excusing my limitations. I feel as if I will never be Tolstoy. I have my little, tiny world that I seem to have to deal with.”* (Anne Tyler, 15 Feb 2015)

*“I’m saying that [having a baby] is still an experience that is not understood because, OK, having a baby is pretty eternal but women are changing, so what it means to have a baby is changing all the time,” she explains. “None of these things is resolved and all I’m trying to do is push the line a little bit further in terms of what you’re allowed to say. That*



*to me is a principle and it has a moral worth that is nothing to do with some middle-class woman sitting there navel-gazing or wittering on – that is not what I’m doing.”* (Rachel Cusk, 3 Oct 2015)

Earlier feminist and ideological theorising saw femininity only in negative terms, and stereotypes of femininity as constructs created by men and used to suppress women (Mills 1997, 87). Nowadays, the meanings of femininity are seen to depend on a wide range of contextual features, such as perceived power relations, for their interpretations and effects (Mills 1997, 88), and, thus, concentrating on feminine roles and experiences does not automatically denote subordination, as suggested. For example, some of the authors explicitly express that they want to explore and deconstruct the constantly evolving social construct called motherhood. Consequently, many seemingly feminine experiences discussed by the female authors have a potential of becoming restrictive and productive depending on how they are represented and framed. This ambiguity agrees with the idea that “every relation and every practice is a site of potential change as it is a site of reproduction” and offers possibilities to “walk away” from the male-centred frame (de Lauretis 1987, 16–17). One typical way of deconstructing traditional femininity and exploring possibilities of female subjectivity has been to investigate what is left unpresented by the representation of gender earlier (ibid., 26).

Feminine appearance and emphasis on looks are often connected with feminine stereotypes. Resisting the traditional ways of representing women’ and female authors’ appearance, or even deciding not to describe it at all, could be one way of evading feminine stereotypes and possibly suggesting new alternatives. Nevertheless, the female authors’ appearance becomes a subject matter in about fifth of the interviews, and most of the representations relate to traditional feminine stereotypes:

*In person delicate and elegant, she’s also the owner of one of the world’s great voices: so rich and languid that I have to remind myself more than once to listen to the words as well as the music.* (Sara Paretsky, 7 Aug 2015)

*Woof is small, wiry, and speaks so softly from her position coiled up on the seat of a chair in a flat in north London that I struggle to hear her voice when I play back the interview tape.* (Emily Woof, 10 Jan 2015)

Admittedly, describing the appearance and character of the interviewee is fairly typical in the genre of interview. Nevertheless, as far as the female authors are concerned appearance seems to be more highlighted when it agrees with the dated ideals of femininity. In the interviews, the descriptions of appearance seem to be the most compliant with the stereotypes of traditional femininity, “a masculinist ‘narrative[s] of femininity’” (Rooney 2004b, 73). This seems to be true even when an author herself strives to refute these stereotypes in her literary work. For example, the thriller writer Sara Paretsky, who is the creator of the subversive female protagonist V.I. Warshawsk and who according to the same interview was “*heavily involved with second wave feminism*” (Sara Paretsky, 7 Aug 2015), is described in a way that resonates with typical, feminine characteristics – “delicate and elegant” with a “rich and languid” voice. Furthermore, the authors’ appearance is quite often juxtaposed with their literary work, as if they were expected to resemble each other:

*I envisioned her as slightly gothic, other-worldly, with a dreamy gaze and a lofty air. But when we meet in a Sydney cafe – that unruly dark hair and Mona Lisa smile now in the flesh and sitting by a table of empty coffee cups – the Brisbane-based writer proves open, engaging and a fast talker; hardly the misty-eyed mystic you’d assume was responsible for a post-apocalyptic world of telepathic teenagers and talking animals. (Isobelle Carmody, 11 Nov 2015)*

Only once an author’s appearance is mentioned when it contradicts feminine stereotypes. However, this particular interview, with the first time author Nell Zink, makes it clear that the author and her writing are in every way unconventional, alternative and “cuckoo” compared to other authors and human beings, for that matter. Interestingly and in comparison, a similar tendency of highlighting femininity does not present itself in relation to the descriptions of the female authors’ character, but rather these descriptions seem to strive for negating feminine stereotypes:

*In conversation, Oliver is direct, no-nonsense and business-like. Her mannerisms are those of the consummate professional, and she clearly has a strong feel for the business end of writing. (Lauren Oliver, 18 Mar 2015)*

*But an hour in, and something closer to what I imagine to be the real Jong emerges: a funny, bright, moderately wise, extremely determined person who is as happy talking about Viagra as she is about Alexander Pope. (Erica Jong, 25 Oct 2015)*

There are also other seemingly subversive subject matters in the interviews, and they will be discussed next.

## Negating Feminine Stereotypes and Seeking Commun(al)ity

The discussion of female experience is by no means limited to seemingly traditional feminine experiences and stereotypes. The authors bring forward almost taboo subject matters such as female aggression and sexuality after menopause. On the other hand, the authors deal with familiar subject matters connected with women, such as body image and lack of confidence. The other subject matters that exemplify female experience in the interviews seem to turn against the stereotypical image of femininity and aim at exploring the outskirts and uncharted territories of female experience. The authors also take up subject matters that have been mulled over and over again, such as the female body and how it is perceived. However, they often explore them in relation to the changes in women's lives in the contemporary society, for example, because of the influence of social media or increasing gender equality. Most of these subject matters also derive from the authors' literary works, and the authors often state that these aspects of female experience are highlighted in their work because they have been ignored or suppressed for too long:

*Female aggression is not often dealt with in literature and July uses it as a metaphor for the tackling of other repressions, both cultural and sexual. July describes herself as "consciously feminist", so was it a deliberate attempt to provoke a discussion about women's physicality? (Miranda July, 8 Feb 2015)*

In general, the manner in which female experience is covered in the interviews moves towards social criticism. First of all, the subject matters tend to highlight women's subordinate position in society, for instance, from lack of encouragement from parents to misogyny at the work place. For example, violence and especially sexual violence against women is a recurrent subject matter in the interviews:

*I decided to write Asking For It because I wanted to talk about the idea that rape isn't just being pulled into an alleyway by a stranger, that there are many different levels. All of my friends have stories of sexual assault and sexual experiences that weren't right. They'll say this is what happened when I was 17 and the terrible thing is I'm not surprised. I'm not surprised that they were sexually assaulted, or raped, that their drinks were spiked or they were too drunk to consent. We need to talk about the idea that sex isn't something that men forcibly take from women. We tell girls 'don't get raped', when we should be teaching boys 'don't rape'." (Louise O'Neill, 26 Jun 2015)*

*She said earlier, I say, that every woman grows up almost prepared for abuse. Was that her experience? She doesn't answer directly. "What I will say is that every female I know has had some sort of experience which is not necessarily violence, but an awareness of being made to be a sexual being before you are ready to be a sexual being," she says. "I think everyone is at least keenly aware of the likelihood of that..." (Hanya Yanagihara, 26 Jul 2015)*

Even when more uplifting subject matters, such as sexuality after menopause, are addressed, they spring from an understanding that previously such topics were not received as well as they are today:

*"A story about the menopause doesn't sound like a big seller," Simpson admits, "but again, it seems to me that someone's got to do it. The language around it is so mythic and fearful; it's a way of dismissing women over a certain age, just getting rid of them." ... "Children were taboo, then death was taboo, but everyone's done death now. Old age – the pleasures of old age – that's the last one, maybe." (Helen Simpson, 24 Oct 2015)*

This emphasis on shortcomings, suffering and continuity of injustice does not only apply to female experience, but also extends to the discussion of human experience generally in the interviews. The category of human experience includes subject matters such as moral complexity of life, loneliness, poverty, divorce, grief, loss and death. Some potentially positive aspects of life, such as relationships, spirituality, survival and adolescence, are featured in the interviews as well. However, they, too, seem to have undertones that suggest misery, misfortune and injustice.

Especially in relation to female experience, there is a sense of continual, almost everlasting struggle – “[s]ometimes it is hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel”, as the author Val McDermid puts it. Even though the authors admit that progress in the everyday life of women has been made, still numerous steps need to be taken:

*"It's interesting because we have felt over the past 20 years that feminism has made steps forward, that women's lot is much different, and in many respects much better than it was 30 or 40 years ago. So I was thinking things had changed, that the next generation of men weren't as institutionally misogynist as the previous were. And then suddenly the internet came along, and gave them a platform to voice their feelings anonymously. And boy, did the bile come out." (Val McDermid, 25 Aug 2015)*

*"When I first read Wuthering Heights I didn't understand why Cathy couldn't marry the person she loved. I didn't understand the property laws, and the constraints on women. Even though laws have changed we still have so many social constraints and so many rules that we set for ourselves and that society sets for us. It's very difficult still to be a woman." (Alice Hoffman, 23 Aug 2015)*

The negative and critical outlook might be partly fuelled by the conception that painful life experiences are the source of artistic creativity, but it more likely stems from the authors' feminist objectives. Many authors in the research material see themselves as spokespersons for women and advocates of gender equality. This is even frequently stated as the ultimate reason for writing fiction:

*"When I began, women needed to be taught the truth about love, babies, money, men. They seemed to know so little and be fed so many misapprehensions. I daresay I had the confidence to do it because I was reared in an all-female family, had a baby without a husband, got a job and took no notice of what men thought."* (Fay Weldon, 7 Feb 2015)

In contemplation of female experience, there is a clear move towards social criticism and, at times, it is extremely difficult to decide whether a subject matter exemplifies women's experience or criticises women's repressed positions in society. Criticism of gender roles and violence against women are definitely such subject matters, and they will be returned to in Chapter 4.2.

In addition to negative outlook on female experience, another noticeable tendency in the interviews is the attitude of highlighting, and even conscious objective of creating, a sense of community between women. First of all, the amount of discussion about female experience is the foremost sign, but the authors also address the topic directly:

*On the whole, July thinks Twitter has made it a good time to be a feminist: "more than anything [women] are supporting each other and they can do that in very powerful ways because of social media... It's kind of a wild time. I think we're all very aware of that power. It feels really good to think: 'Oh wow, it is actually in my control to impact on this woman's life'... you know: I can make someone's book of experimental poetry really sell!"* (Miranda July, 8 Feb 2015)

Furthermore, the sense of community between women is also highlighted in the way that references are made between authors. My rough assessment of the situation is that female authors mainly mention other female authors as their favourite authors, sources of inspiration and kindred spirits. The following quotation from Paula Hawkins' interview is telling as only one male author is mentioned in a list of seven authors:

*Who are your favourite crime writers? I know you read a lot of Agatha Christie when you were growing up in Zimbabwe. – “More recently, it’s people like Megan Abbott, Tana French, Harriet Lane, SJ Watson – there’s so many. Louise Welsh is fantastic, Cara Hoffmann, an American writer, writes really interesting thrillers. I adore Kate Atkinson, her literary as well as her crime output.” (Paula Hawkins, 19 Jul 2015)*

Furthermore, in the discussion of their literary works and personal life, the authors often concentrate on female characters and women-women relationships – to the extent that I sometimes wondered whether there are male characters in the novels at all:

*While the heroines in Simpson’s collections come and go, changing from story to story, they share crucial strands of DNA. In the first place they are, mostly, heroines: men step into the spotlight from time to time, but generally they are there as the foil for Simpson’s astringent depictions of contemporary female lives. (Helen Simpson, 24 Oct 2015)*

Occasionally, it seems that even the readership of the interview is assumed to be all-female, for example, because of the use of first-person plural that seems to refer to members of a specific gender. The interviews do not offer any explanation on these quite clear tendencies, which seem to promote dated feminist ideas of and objectives for shared interests, unity and sense of communality between women based on gender.

Bringing forward women-women relationships has definitely been on the agenda of feminism – even Virginia Woolf mentions the need for it in “The Room of One’s Own” (2007, 614). However, Woolf’s anxiety rises from the fact that women are too often seen in relation to the other gender – in binary opposition to men and as the lack of masculinity (ibid.). This is especially detrimental because, in the binary system of genders, female subjects are seen as negatives, or “Others” as Beauvoir calls them (qtd. in Butler 1999, 14), of male subject. This has the potential of projecting various unfavourable attributes on women (de Lauretis 1987, 19). However, any essential, universal, shared or static essence of women, and hence “a staple subject of feminism”, has been challenged by postmodern feminism, for example, Butler (1999, 4–7). Moreover, feminist theorists, for example, bell hooks in her *Ain’t I A Woman* (1981), have criticised mainstream feminism for not paying enough attention to other social factors that produce inequality among women (Rooney 2006b, 82–83). Consequently, later feminist critics have highlighted and

scrutinised women-women relationships for the very reason of casting light on the irregularities of female experience (Rooney 2006a, 5). What bell and many other theorists criticise is the universalisation of white, middle-class women as “Women”, which segregates other social groups outside womanhood (Rooney 2006a, 12). The problem of “generalisation” has been an ongoing debate in the feminist movement, since some see it as unifying force and some as mere simplification the feminist struggle (Rooney 2006a, 13; bell 1989, 35). The same feminist debates seem to be present in the literary interviews with female authors.

Both the female authors and the writers of the interviews rely extensively on gender difference and “othering”, either by assuming the feminine side or by adopting traditionally masculine attributes and behaviour – perhaps in order to test, defy or deconstruct the boundaries of femininity and representation of women. Still, the binary opposition of genders is strongly sustained in the interviews, even when it is “flipped”:

*In Groff’s own marriage, those gendered roles are flipped. “This book is somewhat of an apology to my husband, who is the primary parent in our family – it’s my attempt to have an empathetic understanding of the way he feels about being the helpmeet,” she says. “I’m not as charismatic, but Lotto [the characteristically masculine protagonist of her novel] shares a lot of me, unfortunately.”* (Lauren Groff, 22 Sep 2015)

This extension of female experience to include subject positions and subjectivities formerly thought off limits and abnormal to women reminds me of the fundamental question behind Butler’s thinking on gender and gender equality: “What sense does it make to extend representation to subject who are constructed through the exclusion of those who fail to conform to unspoken normative requirements of the subject?” (1999, 7) In other words, there is no sense in trying to create a new, extended representation and category of women, “a feminist subject” (ibid.), which is fundamentally based on the foundation of gender difference and discrimination.

Furthermore, the authors also refer to and promote a sense of communality between women, which seems to assume that the category of women is somehow coherent and stable – which is exactly what Butler is striving to refute (1999, 5). Even when social differences between women are acknowledged and the content of “women” is not assumed in advance, Butler sees

problems in these “coalitional” politics<sup>38</sup>, as she calls them: “The insistence in advance on coalitional “unity” as a goal assumes that solidarity, whatever its price, is a prerequisite for political action. But what kind of politics demands that kind of advance purchase on unity?” (Butler 1999, 20) The problem is that coalitional politics usually sees unity as the goal, although, in reality, “the very form coalition, of an emerging and unpredictable assemblage of positions, cannot be figured in advance” (Butler 1999, 20–21). And, prefiguring the goal in advance can lead to self-shaping and self-limiting politics (ibid.). On the other hand, especially in relation to social and political criticism, the female authors seem to advocate the idea of socially constructed gender and the need to diminish gender difference. Despite the female authors’ concentration on shared experience and a sense of community and communality between women, it would be wrong to assume that the authors find female experience alike or equal. There are several occasions in which an author specifically refers to working-class experience, aside from middle-class experience, or to black women’s experience, aside from white women’s experience. Social criticism of gender inequality is extremely common in the interviews, and sometimes the questions of race, class and other social factors emerge in the process.

#### **4.2. Social Critics and Gender Politics**

By no means should gender equality – and social problems and politics around the issue – be a gender-specific subject matter designated only for women. Nevertheless, it is female authors that seem to be inclined to discuss subject matters connected with gender equality. At least, I find it hard to believe that in a group of fifty male authors social issues around gender would attract as much attention as in this group of female authors. Criticism of traditional gender roles, gender inequality, concealed sexism and blatant misogyny in society is extensively featured in the interviews with the

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<sup>38</sup> I.e. “a set of dialogic encounters by which variously positioned women articulate separate identities within the framework of an emergent coalition” (Butler 1999, 26).



female authors. Sometimes these subject matters form the background for the descriptions of the female authors' literary work, personal experiences or female experience. Yet, quite often, they are taken up as acute social problems in society that need to be tackled constantly to bring about change. The chapter will concentrate on the representation of the female authors as social critics and, in particular, on the authors' focus on and perception of gender discrimination in society.

### **(Self-)Directed Social Critics**

In general, the female authors in my research material seem to be socially and politically conscious and eager to take part in political debates. In total, more than half of the authors directly address social problems and political issues in their interviews. The subject matters range from up-coming elections, civil rights and financial crisis to problems caused by religious fundamentalism, income gap and environmental harm. Also, almost always the subject matters relate to the themes of the authors' literary works, and the authors do not seem to avoid taking political stands in their work either:

*"I don't see that books can be written without political context – not if they're relevant and ambitious. Our lives are politically wound. There seems to be such fear in this country of saying that outright about literature, as if it makes for lesser work, as if you're writing a reductive manifesto. But to avoid politics seems somehow juvenile."* (Sarah Hall, 28 Mar 2015)

In Table 2 (see Chapter 3.2), I have tried to describe the critical stances that the female authors have adopted in society with several different titles: social critic, political speaker, political activist, political agitator, environmental critic, human rights activist, women's rights activist, spokesperson for women, feminist activist and feminist. The intention is to illustrate the differences in the female authors' political interests, emphases as well as means and degrees of involvement.

In general, political participation has usually been connected with men and masculinity. For example, Gatens argues that the representation of political agency, "the body politic"<sup>39</sup>, in its

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<sup>39</sup> Gatens traces the metaphor of the human body as a way of describing political life to 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century political theories, such as Thomas Hobbes' *The Leviathan* (1994, 21).

inherent rationality and masculinity is defined in a way that either excludes women's bodies, which are defined by nature, or makes women's contributions invisible and leaves them unacknowledged (1994, 23, 50–55). Accordingly, political life and the public sphere are also constructed in a way that does not easily grant women access (ibid.). According to Gatens, women's attempts to speak from the political body, or even about it, are always considered somewhat deviant (ibid., 24). The coherence, universality and immutability of both the artificial political body and women as a group can certainly be challenged. Also, in reality, the issue of political participation is more complicated than this premise for Gatens' theoretical thinking. However, Gatens' example illustrates well the continuity of social and political structures and processes that defy women generally, not only individual women – because of a conflict between some historical constructions of femininity and masculinity, which are projected on women as a group and political agency as a concept:

[W]omen's exclusion from the political body is ... a consequence of the dominant conception of political society. Women have been constructed as naturally deficient in a specifically *political* capacity, the capacity to create and maintain political right. (1994, 60; emphasis in the original)

Nevertheless, the extensive amount of social and political criticism in the interviews and the subject positions that express the female authors' high involvement in political struggles do not suggest that the authors would consider their standing as secondary, nor does it seem that their positions as political agents are represented as abnormal to them, or to women in more general sense. The only indication that suggests a different attitude to political agency is the female authors' emphasis on women and gender issues.

It is quite evident from the subject positions that fighting social problems connected with women is a matter close to the female authors' hearts. Based on the interviews, it seems that often the authors' political activeness arises from their personal experiences in society, which then filters into their literary work as well. Some of the authors deliberate on the origins of their own political awareness and political awareness among women in general. Some of them see that fighting inequality should be a given for every woman because of women's subordinate position in society.

On the other hand, others find motives that are more directly and intimately connected with their own experiences, for example, being a mother and feeling like an outsider in one's community:

*"If there is an urgency around unsettling these issues," she answers, "I think it is engendered from being a mother. It's hard to believe your child is going to have to go through the same dynamics in the next half-century that you've just finished with."*  
(Claudia Rankine, 29 Jun 2015)

*"Right from the off I was an outsider. I was always forced to think about who I was and issues of identity and self-worth in ways I probably would never have had to if I had been born surrounded by people like me."* (Meera Syal, 17 May 2015)

The outsider status is attributed at least to ethnicity, class, religion, sexuality, problematic childhood and unconventional family life, for example, because of mental problems or alcoholism in the family. Despite the negative undertones, the position of an outsider seems to prove beneficial to the female authors. After all, many of them suggest that it motivates, gives perspective and strength and makes the authors somehow extraordinary – *"You are a swallow among the starlings, my dear"* (Jenny Diski, 7 Nov 2015). The subject positions of an outsider and an observer are prominent in the research material, and they seem to be closely connected with both social activity and creativity. The subject position of an observer refers to the female authors' ways of describing themselves as anthropologists of human psyche and behaviour. Both subject positions become essential components of the authors' experience and her writing process (see Chapter 4.3). In the female authors' speech, gender does not seem to have an isolating effect similar to other social factors or situations in the past, when *"[w]omen were having babies and just disappearing, and no one was saying anything"* (Helen Simpson, 24 Oct 2015). Rather, the female authors seem to think that the unity of women (and men) gives strength to fight subordination and structural discrimination.

### **Women, Men and (Structural) Discrimination**

Traditional gender roles and everyday sexism, which place women in subordinate positions in society, are probably the most common subject matters around gender inequality in the interviews:

*“Growing up, the world was so sexist. Honestly, the very first day of school you were told who you were, what you could do and think, what your personality was supposed to be: sugar and spice and all things nice. The message was everywhere that women were second-class citizens.”* (Candace Bushnell, 21 Jun 2015)

The point of view of gender inequality is definitely on women’s discrimination. Subject matters such as women’s social roles in family, the lack of expectations on women, the use of patronising language about and in addressing women, the restricted understanding of femininity and the depiction of female body under the male gaze are featured in the interviews. More specifically, for example, in the interview with the thriller author Minette Walters, the author talks about the explicit violence done to female bodies in fiction and how this links to real life social problems:

*Crime novels can also provoke repulsion, especially in the depiction of violence against women, and even more so when the books are adapted for screen. There have been complaints ... that TV is too explicit in showing women as victims of sexual and other crimes. Does Walters recognise this issue? “I don’t have a problem with violence against women in crime dramas. Murder is violent in real life, whatever method is used, and far too many victims are women. If fiction helps us learn how vulnerable we can make ourselves, then I applaud it.”* (Minette Walters, 9 May 2015)

In comparison, the damage that gender roles and gendered expectations do on men is only addressed a few times in the interviews, usually as a mere aside: *“Girls are told to pose and boys are told to shoot, and I’m not really sure which one’s worse.”* (Hollie Poetry, 29 Mar 2015). The American author Hanya Yanagihara is one of the few who raises the topic, though in relation to her recent literary work and in comparison with women’s experience:

*“[W]hat I am interested in as a writer is the long-term effect [sexual abuse] has, particularly in men. I think women grow up almost prepared for it in a way. Boys still don’t and it happens to a great many of them. It takes away their sense of masculinity. And of course they are not equipped or encouraged to talk about it. It causes terrible psychic harm. I look at my friends who have experienced this, and these are people who are therapized and can discuss anything but they cannot go near this.”* (Hanya Yanagihara, 26 Jul 2015)

Despite the focus on women’s experience of gender discrimination, only rarely the blame is directly placed on the ones in the superior position. The authors seem to be well aware of the idea of how gender inequality is stored and upheld in the institutions, processes and relationships between actors in society. In the end, it is the systems and processes of patriarchal society that the

authors wish to criticise. Furthermore, the authors' critique targets the systems that actively try to maintain gender distinction and inequality for their own ends, such as media and commercialism:

*"I've come into my own. I'm not afraid of anyone. Yet the media tyrannises us. It's a consumerist orgy. It's just not true that men only want little bitty Vogue models with no flesh on their bones. I know it's not true."* (Erica Jong, 25 Oct 2015)

The idea of structural discrimination arises from the Foucauldian understanding that power resides everywhere (Foucault 1990, 92–93). Power is maintained by and reproduced in society's institutions, discourses, processes, relations and understandings of knowledge and truth (ibid.). Foucault defies the idea that power is wielded by people or groups through episodic, sovereign and repressive acts of domination or coercion, and, instead, sees it as diffused, pervasive and even productive (ibid.). So, in a sense, "power is everywhere" and "comes from everywhere", and it needs neither a subject nor a permanent structure to get a grip on people (Foucault 1998, 63).

The patriarchal system of society, which has developed in the course of history, and its legacy are extremely powerful in maintaining and reproducing gender difference and inequality between genders (de Lauretis 1987, 8). Even though the notion of any universal patriarchy has already been denied (Butler 1999, 6), its stereotypes and norms seem pervasive and difficult to shake off. Even if (some of) the actors of the system have (as individuals) rejected the ideologies that maintain gender difference and inequality, they might agree to many institutional and processual forms of inequality and, thus, help to confirm and maintain them (hooks 1994, 60–65). Moreover, the social construction of gender and gender difference always affect subjects and their sense of self and self-representation, and vice versa, and unconsciously affect their behaviour and thinking (de Lauretis 1987, 9). This connects with the idea of internalised oppression, which is similar to Foucault's idea of internalised discipline and means that members of the social group might adopt the prevalent ideology and take their subordinate status as natural and inevitable and adopt hegemonic discourses (Mills 1997, 81–82). Essentialism, gender difference, structural discrimination and internalised subordination are issues that feminist criticism and theory have constantly addressed and criticised.

Nevertheless, not always is structural gender inequality blamed in the interviews, but also the individuals that support or consent to it. For example, women's roles in supporting the system, or not actively working to demolish it, are slightly criticised in some of the interviews:

*"And I still think women don't respect themselves enough, they don't value themselves enough. They fall for the stuff in the media and in society that makes them devalue themselves, and we need to work on that just as much." She also expresses bafflement that women feel the need to make a grand announcement about whether they are, or are not, feminists. "If you're a woman, surely it's a given?" McDermid sighs. (Val McDermid, 25 Aug 2015)*

Also, Minette Walters' previous quotation continues with a reference to women's appetite in taking pleasure in fictional violence against women:

*She also points out that women make up a large part of the ratings for crime shows: "I'd certainly agree that violence against women would be gratuitous if TV audiences were composed entirely of men. The motives of the writers and directors would be highly questionable in those circumstances!" (Minette Walters, 9 May 2015)*

What is also evident in the previous quotation is that the boundaries for appropriate behaviour seem to vary depending on gender. In general, gender inequality and discrimination are seen as the underlying force behind various, more precise problems and difficulties in society:

*She thinks women have suffered a "net loss" since the 70s. "We've won the right to be eternally exhausted, or that's what my daughter used to say to me. In the US, we're still in the past: no creches, no maternity leave, these attacks on Planned Parenthood [Republicans in the Senate keep trying to choke off funds to the not-for-profit organisation]. It's shocking." On the plus side, though, there is the "huge resurgence" in feminism among the young." (Erica Jong, 25 Oct 2015)*

Current feminist thinking of socially constructed gender, refusal of binary system of genders and objective to deconstruct structural gender inequality are clearly behind the authors' comments on gender discrimination. In some of the interviews, feminism is directly stated as the basis and motive for writing, and the authors are positioned or position themselves as the pioneers and advocates of gender equality. The authors occasionally celebrate the advances made in gender equality, but, more often, they acknowledge the long distance to the finish line and even pay attention to the mistakes made on the way:

*Smith has always been concerned with gender shift and fluidity, via a refusal to accept binaries. The increasing familiarity of this century's culture with such territory*

*(perhaps we are all gradually catching up with her) delights Smith. “I think it’s brilliant. What a life to come through, the changes I have witnessed!” (Ali Smith, 5 Jun 2015)*

*“I always said, we’ve only had one third of a [feminist] revolution. ... [The a]uthor often attracted the ire of feminists, and she certainly never belonged to the world of consciousness-raising groups and marches on Washington. “[Those 70s feminists] they wanted me to put my dungarees on, and write agitprop and eat pussy, and to say it was better than cock, which was absurd. It was politically incorrect not to be a lesbian. I had an affair with a woman, well, it was just a little overnight fling, and it was silly. Neither of us even enjoyed it. When I look back, it seems ridiculous.” She used to be upset when people accused her of being an apologist for child-bearing – this is what the crowd shouted about when she read out the “touching” poems about breastfeeding – but now she doesn’t “give a shit... I’ve been a feminist my entire life. I was walking around with [Simone de Beauvoir’s] *The Second Sex* when I was at high school.” (Erica Jong, 25 Oct 2015)*

Erica Jong’s remark brings into mind Butler’s mention that “[f]eminist critique ought to explore the totalizing claims of a masculinist signifying economy, but also remain self-critical with respect to the totalizing gestures of feminism” (2002, 18–19) – a view that many later feminist have agreed on and developed.

### **Gender Does Not Exist in a Vacuum**

Gender inequality is only one, albeit significant, component in the system of social inequalities in society. The second wave of feminism was later criticised for its way of considering all female experience equal and for not acknowledging the influence of other social factors, for instance, race and class, in the experience of gender discrimination (see hooks 1994; Butler 1999, 22). The authors in my research material are quick to connect gender issues with other social inequalities and minority issues. Many of them refer to the idea of *intersectionality* – one even directly mentions the name of the critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw who has introduced and developed the theory – which is a concept often used to describe the ways in which oppressive discourses, such as racism, sexism, homophobia or xenophobia, are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another (Crenshaw 1989). The theory bases on the idea of social totality, which, for example, in relation to gender means that “a woman’s place ... is not a separate sphere or domain of

existence but a position within social existence generally” and, thus, connected with other social factors (de Lauretis 1987, 9). Effectively, it is the same premise that can be found in Butler’s theory of social constructiveness of gender:

If one “is” a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered “person” transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. It becomes impossible to separate out “gender” from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained. (2002, 6)

In the interviews, gender inequality is discussed at least in connection with ageism, racism, heteronormativity and class hierarchies or, with a more modern approach, income gap between different social groups. Nevertheless, the interviews simply seem to focus on the female experience of social discrimination, rather than trying to highlight the difference in experience of gender discrimination between women of different ages, races, sexual orientations and income levels. Usually, the authors merely approach gender inequality, or other social inequality, from their personal viewpoints and address the difference in experience in the process. Moreover, these issues are not generally deliberated in an in-depth manner, but they appear as commentaries or comparisons to the topics under consideration.

Gender issues in connection with ageism is one of the most common pairings of social inequalities, and at times, it also succeeds in paying attention to the different expectations and attention given to women of different ages:

*“[B]ecause if you’re a woman, society wants to make you invisible as soon as you’re middle aged. You do need to reinvent yourself. You have to reset your goals, and you do need new passions. Nobody talks about this, but if you have the courage, it can be the time when you finally get to look at aspects of yourself that you weren’t able to explore when you were younger because you were so busy trying to live up to society’s expectations.”* (Candace Bushnell, 21 Jun 2015)

*At 73, Jong is not, as she puts it, “going quietly”. The TV networks pointedly failed to invite her into their studios to discuss her first novel for more than a decade when it was published in the US last month – “the problem is HD: they don’t want to display women who look like grannies” – and thanks to this, she finds herself boiling with rage, even though a part of her thinks Miley Cyrus is welcome to the Today show and its crummy sofa.* (Erica Jong, 25 Oct 2015)



The question of gender in relation to racism is directly addressed only by one author, and of hand by another. In general, subject matters relating to race issues, such as institutional racism in society, experience of racism, racial prejudice, racial profiling, race issues in parenting, racial identity and mixing of cultures, arise in seven interviews – in all but one the interviewee is of an ethnic background. In Claudia Rankine's interview, the invisibility of black female lives arises in connection with racial profiling and the recent killings of black men by white policemen, which is one of the subject matters of Rankine's documentary poetry:

*"I know in the States right now, movements such as Black Lives Matter have been grappling with this issue of whether those black lives also equal black female lives, and why the media doesn't focus on the loss of black female lives as much as it focuses on the loss of black men. There are practical reasons," she says. "Race studies professor Kimberlé Crenshaw has talked about how the numbers are just higher for black men. But there is a way in which black women are at the bottom. The invisibility of black women is astounding."* (Claudia Rankine, 29 Jun 2015)

Later in the interview, black female experience is picked up again, this time in relation to parenting:

*She has written in the New York Times magazine about the challenges of being mother to a black son right now, but what does she feel are the particular challenges of raising a daughter? "I feel it's about modelling for her a sense of my own agency in the world. Nothing I say can equal what she sees me do in the world. In an odd way, it's more about me being vigilant around how I value myself; how she sees me interacting with other people; what I put up with, and what I don't. "How do you keep the black female body present and how do you own value for something that society won't give value to? It's a question I try to answer through my own life."* (Claudia Rankine, 29 Jun 2015)

What is interesting is that, on both these occasions, the female side of discrimination is not brought up by the author but by the interviewer. Rankine's interview is actually the only one that discusses (black) male experience in detail, without direct relationship or immediate comparison to women made by the author – it is the interviewer's insertions that bring the female perspective back on the agenda. Nevertheless, this way the interview succeeds in bringing attention to the difference of experience and hierarchies between members of the oppressed group.

## **Authorial Power or Editorial Choice?**

Many subject matters in the interviews seem to derive from the themes, plots and characters of the authors' literary works. However, in fact, the choice of subject matters is influenced by various other factors, too. Especially the topics of social criticism – perhaps because of the authors' keen interest in certain social issues – made me think about how the authors' social standing, cultural prominence and importance, and, for example, literary style and genre affect the subject matters in the interviews. As mentioned before, the authors often seem to deal with topics close to their own social standing, as with the race issues, for instance. Also, for example, the social effect of age and ageism are featured quite often in the interviews, which is partly explained by the advanced age of some of the authors. Some literary genres, such as fantasy fiction because of its typically patriarchal fantasy worlds or crime fiction because of its portrayal of women, bring forward certain subject matters in the interviews.

In my opinion, the well-established authors in my research material seem to address political and social issues more eagerly than the newcomers. The authors' long career and high ranking in the literary community and importance in society clearly have an influence on the topics. According to Bourdieu, authority in the cultural field is largely based on recognition, prestige and knowledge – symbolic capital rather than economic – and actors coming to the field must concentrate on accumulating symbolic capital (Johnson 1993, 7; Bourdieu 1993, 58), whereas those with accumulated symbolic wealth hold the power to legitimise the practices, perceptions and meanings of the field, and the prestige accumulated in the cultural field filters into other fields as well (*ibid.*, 40–44). Probably, the interchange between fields has even increased since the cultural field and artists have increasingly gained capital and authority in the economic field. Some of this authority translates to social and political authority as well – both of which authors traditionally already have (Bourdieu 1993, 30). An author who has just had her first book published has different priorities and limits of agency compared to a renowned author with a long career behind her.

Moreover, from an editorial point of view, authors with different levels of recognition have to be introduced to the reader in a very different manner.

Undeniably, editorial choices are difficult to detect in published interviews. However, in some cases, like with Claudia Rankine, the persistence of the interviewer's questions about black female experience is quite evident. Sometimes the interview is guided by clear reference points in social, political and cultural life that influence the subject matters, such as the poll on Scottish independence or the death of the thriller author Ruth Rendell. However, some of the interviews draw attention to the possible lack of editorial control or groundwork, too. For example, Paula Hawkins, the writer of a novel that was a literary and commercial sensation in 2015, is interviewed three times by three different people. Yet, all three interviews bring forward more or less the same subject matters, even similar quotations. The same is true about Claudia Rankine's two interviews. This suggests either strong agency from the interviewees in deciding subject matters and guiding the interview, or that the frame of the literary interview has become quite rigid – probably because of commercial and editorial interests and practices, as suggested by Fay (2012) and Iyer (2006). The interviewer of Erica Jong addresses the difficulty of seeing through the author's façade and her typical answers and finding new insights and angles:

*Jong has been famous for so long now. She has a tendency to go into autopilot; at first, she more or less ignores my questions, dusting off instead old anecdotes I've read a dozen times before ... But an hour in, and something closer to what I imagine to be the real Jong emerges: a funny, bright, moderately wise, extremely determined person who is as happy talking about Viagra as she is about Alexander Pope. (Erica Jong, 25 Oct 2015)*

Clearly, the interviewers also contribute to the interviews in many ways. For example, Rodden reminds: "[T]he interviewer is also a 'subject' – and a performer ... even if the interviewer is near invisible, he or she plays a subtle yet vital role as producer and co-director of the performing interviewee's life" (2001, 19). Incisively, in order to illustrate the interviewers' involvement, Rodden refers to "stage hands", "supporting interviewers" and "intruders", the latter of which is often embodied by other well-known characters, such as other authors (ibid.). Essentially, the literary interview is filled with power struggles, and both the interviewer and the interviewee are

influenced by various, often conflicting objectives and pressures (Masschelein et al. 2014a, 21).

This is evident in my research material as well.

Traditionally, editorial instructions and interference have been mild and soft in the aesthetics-led arts journalism, and writers have enjoyed relative autonomy in relation to the journalistic paradigm (Jaakkola 2015, 254). This is partly because arts journalists, who are specialised in different cultural fields and art forms, and critics, who are insiders of the cultural field, are presumed and required to possess a great amount of cultural and symbolic capital, and, thus, they are considered legitimate to make judgements and decisions on their own (Jaakkola 2015, 89, 254–255). On the other hand, free(er) form and (partly) different ideals of arts journalism originate from the tradition of arts journalism, which is based on the genres of opinion-based art criticism and less restricted feature and human interest stories (ibid.). However, recent changes in arts journalism and the literary interview, such as the more journalistic approach, increasing commercial attitude and recycling of contents, potentially influence the power relations between the interviewer and the interviewee, too (see Rodden 2001; Jaakkola 2015).

On the level of contents, the authors seem to speak quite freely on the themes of their literary works, topics of their personal life and social issues. Their own voice and tone come across in the numerous direct quotations. Often the writers of the interviews also have a distinguishable voice. Taken into consideration that most of these voices are women (only five of the interviewers are men), it is quite disturbing how stereotypically the female authors are represented at times. Not only are the authors constantly targeted by “overt references to children, marriages, or attractiveness”, which is the besetting sin of female authors’ interviewers according to Perry (2013), but, they are also subjected to worn-out, undermining stereotypes about female creativity and feminine roles. The gendered tendency of highlighting female authors’ personal lives and autobiographies over their literary works, whose presence I noted in my research material, is criticised by some critics as well (Perry 1993, Berry 2013). Moreover, many of the interviews highlight the female authors’ feminine appearance. Even the authors themselves seem to end up

endorsing gender difference because of their extensive portrayal of female experience, support to other female authors and aim to create a sense of community between women – all of this despite, and partly because of, the fact that the authors seem to be well aware of gender problems in society. In the end, the possibility remains that the female writers, both interviewers and interviewees, are using the stereotypes and conventions subversively in order to deconstruct them and to explore alternatives, as noted before (see Chapter 4.1). However, this remains debatable as it is certainly not made explicit.

For many of the authors, fiction itself is stated as a means to explore the possibilities of alternative realities whose social structures and hierarchies are differently established from ours; this is especially clear amongst the authors of fantasy fiction:

*Jemisin's stories almost always involve a flawed order, and the efforts (also flawed) to overthrow it. ... "As a black woman," Jemisin tells me, "I have no particular interest in maintaining the status quo. Why would I? The status quo is harmful, the status quo is significantly racist and sexist and a whole bunch of other things that I think need to change."* (NK Jemisin, 27 Jul 2016)

Using fiction in this way is not foreign to feminist approaches either, and it is noted in feminist literary criticism, too (Johnson 1998, 13). For example, Anne Cranny-Francis in her work *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (1990) has deliberated the possibilities afforded by fictional genres to explore new possibilities about society and about the roles and conceptions of women and noted that, even though many imaginary genres let the imagination fly, the canons of these genres are based on highly conservative worldviews and values.

According to McGuigan's view, regarding the politics of the cultural public sphere, three broad stances are available for actors of the field: "uncritical populism", "radical subversion" and "critical intervention" (2005, 436–438). In the first one, consumer capitalism is considered democratic and consumers are sovereign to consume what they want. The latter two refer to more critical stance: radical subversion finds consumer culture deplorable and emphasises countercultures and "semiological guerrilla warfare" in order to overturn the traditional, existing cultural field, whereas critical intervention "combines the best of uncritical populism – an appreciation of the

actually existing cultural field – with the best of radical subversion, producing a genuinely critical and potentially popular stance”. (ibid.) For the most part, the female authors in my research material adopt the latter two attitudes towards literature, the literary field and the field of cultural production in a more general sense. Even today, the fictional worlds of literature, cultural production and the cultural field are far from equal, and the authors remind of this fact relentlessly.

#### **4.3. Critics and Artists of the Biased Literary Field**

Principally, criticism addressed to the literary community and the cultural field revolves around three different subject matters: the depiction of women in literature and arts in general, the position and importance of female authors and their work in the literary world, and the dichotomy of high and popular literature and genre hierarchies. In addition to these, some interviews call attention to race issues in literature or criticise the commercial side of literature and its influence on authors’ profession and freedom of speech. Nevertheless, more than one in three interviews raise subject matters in the first three categories, and in all three categories the importance of female authors in particular is also on the agenda. These are also subject matters that are regularly discussed elsewhere on the pages of *The Guardian*. For example, in 2015, numerous news articles, blogposts, column entries and opinion pieces were published in *The Guardian* that addressed topics such as masculine literary tradition and canon in the Western world,<sup>40</sup> sexism in publishing<sup>41</sup> and prize-giving,<sup>42</sup> differences in attitudes towards female and male authors and their work<sup>43</sup> and the need to promote women, female authors and feminist ideas of gender equality in literature and the literary

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<sup>40</sup> Cooke, Rachel. “100 Best Novels: One in Five Doesn’t Represent Over 300 Years of Women in Literature.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 16 Jan 2015. Web. 15 Jan 2016.

<sup>41</sup> Flood, Alison. “Sexism in Publishing: ‘My Novel Wasn’t the Problem, It Was Me, Catherine’.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 6 Aug 2015. Web. 30 Apr 2016.

<sup>42</sup> Flood, Alison. “Books about Women Less Likely to Win Prizes, Study finds.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 1 Jun 2015. Web. 15 Apr 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Shaw, Rebecca. “Colleen McCullough: We’ll Celebrate a Woman for Anything, as Long as It’s Not Her Talent.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 30 Jan 2015. Web. 15 Jan 2016.

establishment.<sup>44</sup> The representation of women in fiction, female authors' position in the cultural field, and the construction of the female author as an artist will be discussed further in this chapter.

### **Slaughtered Female Bodies and Naïve Girls Falling in Love**

A quarter of the interviews criticise the lack of female characters and the biased representation of women in literature and other mediums of the cultural field. Especially certain literary genres, such as fantasy, crime and young adult fiction, rouse the ire of the female authors. Many seem to agree that too often women are missing from fantasy, dead in crime and merely looking for love in young adult fiction:

*Jemisin herself finds the traditional white male fantasy milieu somewhat laughable, or at least incongruous. "I hear all the excuses: things were just like that back then. There really were 90% men in medieval Europe and they were all white and somehow they magically got silk from East Asia and we don't know how that happened, we're not going to talk about that," she said. "But that makes no sense to me. I don't really understand why so many fantasy writers choose to focus on worlds that just seem strangely denuded. But to them I guess it doesn't seem strange. And I guess that's their privilege. It isn't mine."* (NK Jemisin, 27 Jul 2015)

*"I'm conscious of the fact that there are too many dead women," says Hawkins when I bring this up. "It has become a cliché and I'm not really interested in thinking about that particularly, although I do watch that kind of stuff on telly." She says she found *The Fall*, the TV series in which beautiful young women are tortured and murdered by a ludicrously attractive serial killer, "really problematic – it was really interesting, but it did seem to glamorise it".* (Paula Hawkins, 21 Apr 2015)

*"The idea of teenage girls having to be ugly, naive or antisocial baffled me. I thought: what if you are fine? There are not many stories out there about a girl who is fine and confronted by things other than falling in love." ... She also has a theory about teenage girls and the way they are "betrayed" by YA fiction. ... She adds: "The world is usually saved in YA novels as the teenage girl figures out who she is and falls in love." ... "[T]he overall impression is you can't possibly know who you are because, whatever you think you're like, you've not experienced enough to know the truth."* (Helena Coggan, 1 Feb 2015)

Apart from frustration, the quotations reveal the authors' intention to improve the representation of women in literature. In relation to their recent and past literary works, the female authors often use

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<sup>44</sup> Dean, Michelle. "Race, wit and mansplaining: female authors debate at Los Angeles books festival." *The Guardian*, 20 Apr 2015.

the time to describe the more empowered and complex female characters that they have created, compared to those in earlier and even contemporary literature by men. The interviews seem to suggest that female authors' literary works contribute in constituting a more versatile, realistic image of women than earlier in literature or media, and that this should be emphasised in the interviews, too.

While male authors seem to be constantly questioned about their portrayal of women in their literary interviews – and usually for a good reason (see van Zoonen 1994; Moody 2006; Rooney 2006b) – the same questions are not posed to female authors, neither about the portrayal of women nor men. Actually, in my research material, only two authors are questioned about their male characters, both of whom seem to feel quite confident in their portrayal of male experience and characters:

*Critics say Tyler's men can be vague and victim-y, although in Spool they vary from a rock-solid patriarch to flaky sons. "I had a really good father and brothers. I don't feel it's a stretch if I write as a male character. I feel I know what men are feeling, as much as I know what women are feeling."* (Anne Tyler, 15 Feb 2015)

The representation of individuals in the subordinate group is politically more pressing and needs to be acknowledged, deconstructed and improved. However, I find it unfair to assume that female authors could naturally elude patriarchal stereotypes of women, or other social bias for that matter. Female authors murdering female characters and women enthusiastically consuming these stories are not criticised as strongly as the same done by male authors and men:

*Although there is a murder – and I don't think I'm giving anything away by saying the victim is female – it doesn't feel like the gratuitous, sexualised murders of attractive young women that pile up in so much crime fiction.* (Paula Hawkins, 21 Jun 2015)

*She also points out that women make up a large part of the ratings for crime shows: "I'd certainly agree that violence against women would be gratuitous if TV audiences were composed entirely of men. The motives of the writers and directors would be highly questionable in those circumstances!"* (Minette Walters, 9 May 2015)

For example, questioning female authors on their choice and representation of female characters' race, class and sexual orientation might bring out interesting insights and reveal the bias in their thinking as well. After all, Mulvey's original thinking about the male gaze does not relieve female



spectators from its influence, but they become both subjects and objects of spectatorship which entails either masochistic identification with the female object or masculinisation of their position (van Zoonen 1994, 93). Theoretically this is an interesting perception, though quite constricted and constrictive and, for example, unable to acknowledge the idea of an active audience and subjective experience, as criticised later (Moody 2006, 176). One would hope that female authors are conscious of the bias and pay attention to their portrayal of women. After all, for some, creating resistant and empowering female characters is the whole motivation for writing fiction:

*[H]er literary career was born out of the conviction that it ought to be possible to “create a woman who was a person, not an angel or a monster”. ... [I]t’s the personal that has motivated Paretsky throughout her career: her desire to create a woman who refuses to be silenced; whose conviction that her voice deserves to be heard makes up for Paretsky’s corresponding lack of one. “It all comes down, in the end, to the need for speech,” she says. “I’m easily personally silenced, and in the public sphere, speech for women remains a deeply problematic issue.” (Sara Paretsky, 7 Aug 2015)*

As the representation of women is undoubtedly a political issue, asking what kind of political, social and historic thinking lies behind every female character should be encouraged, and featured more in literary interviews with female authors, too.

### **Lack of Prestige, Prosperity and Prizes (for Being a Woman)**

The inferior position and lack of appreciation of female authors and their work in the literary world are recurrent subject matters in the interviews with female authors. The authors approach the subject matter from two perspectives: on one hand, the sexism and gender discrimination that the female authors themselves encounter in the literary community and establishment, and, on the other hand, the prejudice and bias that their literary work faces in publication, reception and prize-giving. Furthermore, at times, the female authors’ criticism pays attention to the male dominance in literary field, and, at times, to the difficulties encountered by women. However, the perspectives are not separate but interrelated parts of gender inequality inside the cultural field. In total, one in four interviews raises the topic of gender discrimination in the cultural field.

There is nothing new about sexist remarks, overt concentration on the female authors' appearance, shortage of possibilities for female authors and lack of support from other authors that the female authors describe in the interviews. The following passages from the interviews illustrate how successful, creative women are sometimes perceived in the art world:

*She starts by telling me about how much trouble she's had getting her selected poems published. One literary publishing house, she says, called it too big ("That means, 'too female,'" Myles says). Her identity as an out lesbian – a "dyke", in her terms – made it even harder to get publishers to believe she could have wide appeal. ... Myles can be wry on the subject of men's dominance in the artistic and literary fields – in the art world, where she's got a second career going as an art writer, she tells me, publishers literally tell women artists that their catalogues raisonn  should be shorter than men's. (Eileen Myles, 1 Oct 2015)*

*"Follow the line of the money and there's always a man at the top. When I was [executive producer] on Lipstick Jungle [the NBC series based on her book of the same name], all our executives were women and there was a lot of talk about how difficult it is to get men to look seriously at women's creative work. There's the question of likability. It's always in the room. We would say: we like her because she's strong, she's interesting. But a man would say: I'm worried people won't like her if she does "X" or "Y". This is why we need more female studio heads. Also, if something works, the men take the credit. If it doesn't, they run away and it's all the woman's fault." (Candace Bushnell, 21 Jun 2015)*

Not for nothing, the literary world has a reputation as an old boys' club. Gender discrimination seems to be so extensive that even the female authors sometimes banter about the subject matter:

*Offill laughs that a group of women writers she knows have discussed making a pact about blurbs, to emulate the men who often seem quicker to call each other a genius: "What if we just said, 'She is arguably the greatest writer of our generation. Or any generation.' About everyone." (Jenny Offill, 28 Feb 2015)*

Similar to the effort to create a sense of community between women in the lifeworld, the female authors find strength in the relations between women in the art world, too:

*"We have always been up against the canon, and the canon is traditionally male," she says. "That is what this book is about – about how we live up against the canon and how we survive, how we make art against the odds." Smith is a notable supporter of other women artists ... "My nature is feminist," she says. "How could you not be a feminist and be alive? The world is full of brilliant, interesting women." (Ali Smith, 5 Jun 2015)*

Nevertheless, even though this solidarity between women is the general view in the interviews, a few authors also comment on the prejudice inside the feminist movement and the lack of support from other female authors and critics, if an author or her writing does not comply with the accepted forms and she refuses to join the ranks. Furthermore, one author describes how the influential

organs of feminist movement, such as publishing houses, have a strong influence on female authors' writing, and not always in a positive sense:

*"I do think there was this kind of artificial thing [writing about female experience] that happened at the beginning because I was published by Virago and if you write for Virago you have to foreground women's experiences. ... I would have moved on to representing both sexes much earlier and much more easily, in a sense. So I think that was a slightly distorting effect." Was she aware of it at the time? "I was getting very restless towards the end." She concedes that she went "to the other extreme, and wrote about men in an all-male institution". (Pat Barker, 29 Aug 2015)*

Even though one of the interviewers says that authors "*don't like to talk nuts and bolts [because m]oney and commercialism are often thought of as antithetical to the literary process, or at least quite vulgar*" (Lauren Oliver, 18 Mar 2015), many of the female authors talk openly about the bias and discrimination in publishing – not only in regards to gender but also to race and age. What the female authors especially criticise is the critical and public reception of their works and the literary award system inside the literary establishment, in which being a woman and especially writing "feminine" is abhorred. The predominantly masculine literary canon – as well as agents, institutions and awards systems maintaining it – is criticised, as is the lack of appreciation given to the so-called feminine genres, such as romance and the domestic novel. The authors' criticism ties in with the criticism of the dichotomy of high and popular literature and genre hierarchies, which still show especially in the biased critical reception of popular literature genres. At least once, these genres were mainly populated and consumed by women (see Anderson 2006; Moody 2006). In the interviews, the female authors of the less appreciated genres defend their writing against the simplistic views that claim that they would lack in substance:

*"People say I write about the family all the time, but in fact I just put people into that shape, or use that shape to write about deeper truths. I was more interested in separation and connection, disconnection and love." (Anne Enright, 9 Aug 2015)*

*"Just because a book is classified by that dreaded term 'women's commercial fiction' doesn't mean that it can't take a look at societal issues or address things that are going on in the world ... If I can make people think while also being accessible, and possibly make them laugh and cry a bit at the same time, then, frankly, I don't care what they call me. I'd like to be the Puccini of fiction. I'm unembarrassed by the joy of making people feel something." (Jojo Moyes, 23 Sep 2015)*

*“For years we’ve been told that our stories aren’t as important, that the concerns raised by Marian Keyes are lesser than those raised by Nick Hornby. I wanted to tell teenage girls that their stories aren’t trivial. Their voices are worthy of being heard. I wanted to say speak up, you don’t have to silence yourselves.”* (Louise O’Neill, 26 Jun 2015)

Nevertheless, the problem is not only that *literature* about female experience is thought to lack in substance, but that *women’s* experience is thought to lack in substance, which shows in one comment:

*“[S]omehow we still feel that male thought is more serious. We have a hierarchy in which abstract thought is more serious than thought about the private life. But then, annoyingly, when men write books about domesticity they’re praised enormously for it, as if it’s a huge breakthrough. In those struggling years when I was trying and failing to write, I did start books about the miner’s strike or French political prisoners in the 1870s – that one sounds like a Booker prize winner even as I say it. But they were other people’s books, not mine. In the end, it’s a necessity: you write what you can. You have this key, you open this door, and of course it’s this place where you’re at home. So it isn’t really a choice – though I don’t mean I’d rather be writing something else, because I wouldn’t: this is what I have to say.”* (Tessa Hadley, 6 Sep 2015)

What is also illustrated by the example above is that some of the authors seem to believe that there is a difference in literature written by women and men – not based on any essential difference between genders, but because of the way women and men are socially structured and conditioned. Hadley is not the only author, or interviewer, who draws attention to the differences in thinking between women and men:

*Hawkins joins a growing list of female psychological thriller writers being eagerly promoted by publishers hungry for the next Gillian Flynn. Does she think women approach this genre differently? “It’s difficult to say. I certainly think there is this domestic noir trend, but there are plenty of men who write in that as well. I think perhaps women are less interested in spies and serial killers and are more interested – I certainly am – in everyday domestic dramas and real threats. Men tend to be attacked by strangers, women tend to be attacked by people they know.” Most women, she points out, “are made to think about themselves in terms of what they should be doing to prevent violence happening to them”.* (Paula Hawkins, 21 Apr 2015)

*A final question to a writer who continues the line of Christie, Dorothy Sayers, James and Rendell. Why has English crime fiction been so female-led? “I think most women are amateur psychiatrists. We’re brought up to be like that. We think much more about the whys than most men do: ‘Why has someone done that?’ And that is an advantage in writing crime novels.”* (Minette Walters, 9 May 2015)

From the authors’ comments and the commercial success of psychological thrillers by women at the moment, it is evident that it is not always a disadvantage to be a woman and write in a “feminine”

way – though admitting that, despite its commercial success, crime novel is one of the genres underrated in the literary establishment:

*“There is still a great deal of snobbery about crime and thriller writing. There are people who think a crime novel can’t be proper literature, mainly because they are prejudiced against genre fiction and writing that is plot-based. Whether one ought to care about this, I’m not sure. Personally, I’ve always thought crime fiction is the best kind of literature. Done well and properly, there is no better kind of fiction. If other people can’t see that, then I think that’s a shame for them but I am not going to get angry about it.”* (Sophie Hannah, 20 Dec 2015)

Similar to their agency in society, the female authors seem to think that their outsider status in the cultural field can boost their creativity and even become an advantage – in certain genres, for example crime fiction, writing in a way different from male authors has proved beneficial for the female authors. On the other hand, in other genres, such as fantasy and science fiction, female authors’ position as outsiders seems to be highly negative. Even though NK Jemisin sees herself in the position of a literary pioneer, which is also one of the subject positions regularly embodied by the authors, she constantly faces opposition and feels that female authors – as well as non-white authors – still struggle to gain appreciation, literary recognition and even basic human respect in the field of science fiction:

*“I see unorthodox change and I see it being effective. And that gives me additional material to possibly write with.” Jemisin’s work itself is part of a slow but definite change in sci-fi and fantasy. She first got involved in fandom and writing through online forums. “I remember a few times going into bastions of the genre and just fleeing in horror,” she said. “For a while you would go into the Asimov forum and see people openly speculating about the humanity of black people, or women.” Things are better in some ways, as Jemisin’s own successes demonstrate. But the progress has generated resistance. Earlier this year, a number of writers and sci-fi industry insiders began to organise and protest against the fact that nominees for the Hugo awards have become substantially less white and less male.* (NK Jemisin, 27 Jul 2015)

Closely related to the subject position of an outsider is the position of an observer of human psyche and behaviour. In my research material, many authors emphasise how they see themselves as lay anthropologists, which profits their literary work, too:

*“I’m fascinated by people’s inability to recognise what is going wrong in their own lives or to analyse their own behaviour. The joy of writing fiction is that most people are self-deluding to an extent and I find that a rich source of inspiration.”* (Jojo Moyes, 23 Sep 2015)

Other obvious examples are the quotations from the crime writers above that suggest that female authors might be more tuned to human psychology. This is an opinion that some of the female authors express directly, but which is also emphasised by the fact that a fair proportion of the writers' and authors' description of the authors' literary works concentrate on the literary characters and their relationships.

Despite the amount of criticism towards the literary world and the cultural field, the female authors do not express as deep gloominess about their position in the cultural field as they do about their, and other women's, position in society. A sense of pride in one's own work and readiness to speak up for themselves read from the examples in this chapter. Most of the interviewees are established, successful authors, and, partly due to that fact, probably have a strong sense of agency in the cultural field.

### **Artists After All?**

The representation of the female authors' creativity and agency seems to be different from male authors, and they are widely and constantly discriminated against in the cultural field. This raises the question whether female authors are perceived as fully-fledged actors of the art world even today – whether there is still a distinctive category for female authors in the art world. The significance of the literary interview is often perceived to be in its way of creating and promoting the author's personality and even in its "potential to cultivate" the writer as intellectual or sage – as an autonomous, auratic artist, that is – albeit the focus has somewhat shifted due to many changes in journalism, the art world and the position of the author (Rodden 2001, 6; Martens 1998, 14: qtd. in Masschelein et al. 2014b, 67). In any case, the literary interview plays its part in either emphasising or de-emphasising the female authors' position as literary artists.

Earlier I expressed my concern over the fact that the female authors are rarely directly described as artists in the interviews – not at least as the artists in the Romantic sense in which

artistry is often seen as an innate quality that manifests itself as creativity and excellence in one's particular art form (Chadwick 2007, 67). Instead, the female authors of my research material seem to relate to a different, perhaps more recent view of the artist as a political actor, who is actively involved with social and political life and creates to influence society and social reality of people. Many authors directly address the question "Why I write?" in the interviews, and they often acknowledge the imperative of specific social and political content in an author's work – that you have to have "something to say":

*"I have not been writing, partly because I don't feel I have anything urgent to say and I don't really feel I should start until I do," she says. "I understand why writers and artists go back to certain projects time and again. They may be done with it, but the project is not done with them. You have created this thing which you love and sort of resent."* (Hanya Yanagihara, 26 Jul 2015)

Furthermore, the female authors are constantly implicitly constructed and construct themselves as artists in the literary interviews. Nevertheless, their artistic personas arise from their characterisation, rather than from explicit naming. The authors are represented as having creative potential and being multiply talented and successful in their endeavours and making a living as an author – as artists in their own right. However, the portrayal is full of paradoxes, and sometimes the authors' artistry and literary success are highlighted and undermined in the very same sentence or paragraph.

Both being an outsider and being an observer of human behaviour and mind are common to the representation of an artist – the "rational intellectual" who withdraws from society into one's inner world (Parker and Pollock 1981, 86–87, 99). Interestingly and quite paradoxically, these two subject positions are both extremely prevalent among the female authors in the literary interviews. Positions outside society's and the cultural field's inner circle seem to broaden the authors' perspective and titillate their creativity:

*When she goes into schools to give talks she stresses to the kids who feel different ("and all kids feel different") that being on the margins looking in is always the most creative place to be. "We had a park near our house where all the kids used to gather, pretty feral, and I remember swinging on this swing, ridiculously high. If I swung high enough I could see over the trees and to the horizon stretching. And I remember vividly thinking, the world is bigger than this. I want to get out there."* (Meera Syal, 17 May 2015)

*Zink's brand is built on being an outsider, or, as she puts it, "a naive, on-the-job, training novelist". If she were an insider, she probably would have felt obliged to consider plot, which is not something that holds her back in The Wallcreeper. (Nell Zink, 17 Jun 2015)*

Furthermore, when the female authors describe their experience as an author, the desire of and quest for solitude is definitely one of the most common experiences, especially when contrasted with commercial book tours and expectations and requests by the readers. The image of an artist as an anti-social recluse still has a strong hold in the cultural field, even though, for example, increase in political and social engagement, commercialism and participatory and collaborative art forms must have somewhat weakened this modernist image. Nevertheless, the authors still refer to this image, and, at times, consciously contrast themselves with it:

*"I'm a relatively rare bird, in that I'm quite a social writer, and I loved my job [as a publicist]. It takes time to get used to it, that thing – Victor experiences it in the book – when you only know it's raining because your mail is damp." (Sloane Crosley, 8 Nov 2015)*

Another depiction typical of the female authors in these interviews is that many of them are characterised as multitalented artists – meaning that they do not only excel at writing but also at theatre, cinema, visual arts, music and other artistic trades:

*Until that point, she had been making a name for herself as a performance artist, crafting multimedia installations she referred to as "live movies" which she took to venues across the globe, including the ICA in London. After the success of her first full-length feature film, July wrote a collection of short stories, No One Belongs Here More Than You, which promptly scooped the 2007 Frank O'Connor award and was described by the chair of the judges as "a book of original genius". And now, as if that weren't enough to engender an existential groan of self-hatred among struggling writers and artists the world over, July has written a novel. (Miranda July, 8 Feb 2015)*

It is a fact that these female authors take part in various art forms, but the decision to bring it out in a literary interview is always a choice. The authors' previous and current, secondary employment is often highlighted, too, and for no specific purpose. Even though expertise in many fields is generally thought as an accomplishment, it also attracts prejudice, as Miranda July's comment on her own achievements reveals:

*"It's hard to fully take someone seriously in each medium. You just want them to be really good at one thing and then you can believe they care. All I can say is that the creative art of moving between the media is my process – genuinely. I've done it from the get-go." (Miranda July, 8 Feb 2015)*



In a way, this contemporary image of a multidisciplinary artist contradicts the traditional image of an artist as the peak of special talents and with a particular creative outlet, and this might partly explain why multiply skilled artists are sometimes met with some reservation. Thus, describing the female authors as multi-talents has the effect of both highlighting and undermining their artistic abilities depending on the readers' associations.

In the interviews, the female authors' personalities, behaviour and ways of life are often described through polarisation: on one hand, they are described as extremely extraordinary, and, on the other hand, as outstandingly unremarkable. In general, the duality of an author's personality is mentioned frequently in my research material, as is the possible tension between her appearance and personality or between her physical existence and mental capacities:

*She shows up simply dressed, unadorned by any of the rich trappings on offer in the post shops of the gentrified neighborhood around us. And as soon as we begin to talk, the kinetic energy of her mind sucks me right in. (Eileen Myles, 1 Oct 2015)*

Understandably, the use of polar opposition in characterisation creates interesting textual and semantic tension, which can be used as a stylistic effect in journalistic writing. Furthermore, describing a high-flying author as down-to-earth in character and leading a typical middle-class life can be used to make her more relatable to the reader of arts journalism:

*Annie Freud lives on a smallholding in Dorset with a dog, sheep, chickens and her second husband Dave, a retired electrical engineer she met on the internet, who took her on a first date to Hackney City Farm in east London. (Annie Freud, 27 Jun 2015)*

For example, Chaney explains that emphasising how public figures represent and embody contrasts between the ordinariness of the everyday and the extraordinary is a way of constructing them as celebrities (2002, 107, 114). Of lately, authority can be seen to be gained increasingly through ordinariness and its "an empathetic appeal" to audiences (ibid.). Often descriptions of this type relate to the authors' characters and lives outside their professional lives. However, similar polarisation is used in relation to the description of their success.

Descriptions of the female authors' commercial and literary success can be found in most of the interviews, and it is done in a variety of ways, for example, by describing the authors'

previous and most successful work, any awards or nominations they have received, critical acclaim from well-known literary critics, praise from other authors, and financial success or success in other fields of art. However, only rarely is the success unconditional or straightforward. More often than not, the female authors' success is contrasted with the difficulties, prejudice and failures that they have encountered earlier in their careers, or with the mixed reviews or lack of praise or recognition, from either the critics or the wider public, that they have received. Nevertheless, for some reason, financial uncertainty experienced by authors is taken up extremely rarely. As a matter of fact, it is openly talked about only in the literary newcomer Paula Hawkins' two interviews.

The paradoxical portrayal of and attitude towards the female authors' talent and success described above is reflected and continued in the authors' comments on themselves. A fair proportion of the female authors are represented as doubting or questioning their status as authors:

*"I call myself a writer," she says, halfway through a paragraph discussing the difficulties of coming of age in a male-dominated literary landscape. "But I do so without great conviction." ... These are living, breathing books, easy to fall for, and she has the sales figures and bulging trophy cabinet to prove it. If she hasn't earned the right to call herself a writer, who has? (Sara Paretsky, 7 Aug 2015)*

*But for a long time, everything she wrote ended up in the bin ("The sound of the voice in my ear as I typed, repeating 'this is crap, this is crap'"). (Jenny Diski, 7 Nov 2015)*

*A "really, really secret writer" for many years, Samson wrote her first novel in six weeks because she wanted it finished before her short stories came out and bad reviews crushed her confidence. (Polly Samson, 7 Mar 2015)*

Some blame of the lack of confidence is put on the fast pace demanded by the publishing industry and on the pressures caused by earlier success, but also on the authors' growing demands on themselves:

*"Part of the problem I had is that the first book was so much more successful than I could have anticipated, which created expectations in my own mind. I was terrified that I was going to be found out: that I was this impostor. I had so much self-doubt. It was the same doubt that stopped me being published at all till I was 37." (Petina Gappah, 5 Sep 2015)*

*"I remember saying to Ruth [Rendell], 'I suppose when you've written as many books as you have it gets easier.' She turned to me as if I was a wee bit slow and said, 'No, dear, it gets harder.'" McDermid smiles. "It's only now, as time's gone by, that I've understood what she meant – that if you have that desire to become a better writer, if you have that desire to take every book as a challenge, then it's never going to get easier." (Val McDermid, 25 Aug 2015)*

None of the authors explicitly suggest that their lack of confidence is produced by or related to the subordinate position of the female artist. Nevertheless, it is possible that constant discrimination, prejudice and devaluation become internalised and, to some extent, can be manifested as dismissive, self-criticising, self-shaping and self-limiting attitudes in the subordinate self (Mills 1997, 82–83).

This is evident, for example, in Erica Jong's (former) self-doubt:

*[H]er publisher told her it was basically Portrait of the Artist... as a young woman, by which he meant that it was a literary novel no one would buy (the only reason Jong didn't give it that title, she insists, was that she thought it would invite mockery, what with women not really being allowed to call themselves artists). She was told it would sell 3,000 copies at best, and that she shouldn't expect anything: "So I didn't." (Erica Jong, 25 Oct 2015)*

Nevertheless, for Mills, who is following Foucault, the sites and processes of oppression are possible sites of resistance: "[I]nstead of seeing the difficulties as being one's own responsibility or fault ... one can begin to trace ways in which personal difficulties can be caused by larger societal forces and other individuals and social groups" (1997, 82). Consequently, at least Jong self-doubt is gone, and, based on the interview, Mills' strategy is exactly what Jong aims at following in her literary works. One of the authors also comments directly on the relation between literary interviews and female authors' possibilities of being perceived as artists. Interestingly, Jenny Offill is one of the few who names herself as an artist, or "an art monster" as she calls herself:

*Offill, had always planned to be "an art monster", someone ruthless, who would never let family ties get in the way of her writing. Offill used to pore in vain over Paris Review interviews; she didn't find enough female art monsters to console her, though in a way women are the only real ones – when it's a man "they just call it being an artist". (Jenny Offill, 28 Feb 2015)*

Nevertheless, whilst criticising gender difference and discrimination, she herself resorts to both. Clearly, there are still many problems in the representation and position of women, both in society and in the art world, and these are issues that the female authors set their hearts into and shout from the rooftops. And, if not yet fully as artists, at least as loud social critics, which ultimately enables change.

## **5. Conclusions – Inconclusive Back and Forth between Ways of Thinking**

Despite the apparent differences between the female authors' social, cultural and literary positions and their literary works, which vary in topics, genres, styles and the acclaim achieved, the female authors deal with extremely similar subject matters in their literary interviews. Female experiences, both conservative and patriarchal as well as reformative and resistant, prevailing gender difference and discrimination in society, and the dismissive, disparaging and sexist representation and treatment of women and female authors in the literary field and art world are topics of interest and criticism in most of the interviews. Likewise, partly because connected to the subject matters, subject positions that are similar to each other recur throughout the interviews. "Feminine" positions, such as mother and wife, and "feminist" positions, such as spokesperson for women and feminist activist, constantly come up in the interviews. However, the degree to which particular subject positions are applicable and relevant to each author and embraced by them in these interviews varies greatly.

The representation and reconstruction of the female authors' characters alternate between traditional and more postmodern ways of understanding and representing creative artists, authors, women and human beings, for that matter. Nevertheless, the characterisation is extensively based on polarisation of two extremes or alternatives, for example, juxtaposition of extra-ordinariness and ordinariness or success and self-doubt. Polarisation can be used to make the authors more interesting or relatable to the readers, but it also potentially undermines the female authors' position as creative artists. Furthermore, the representation of the female authors' appearance, which is surprisingly common in spite of constant criticism, highlights traditional femininity and feminine characteristics – granting that appearance is sometimes juxtaposed with potentially subversive, albeit usually traditionally masculine, behaviour traits. The polarisation of the feminine and masculine attributes is maintained extensively – as is gender difference in general. The persistent similarities in subject matters, subject positions and characterisation mean that the literary

interviews with female authors become quite similar to one another and rigid not only in their contents but in form and structure as well – an addition to some rigidity caused by increasing commercial and editorial pressures that standardise processes, formats and layouts (Pietilä 2007, 295; Masschelein et al. 2014a, 7–8).

On the other hand, I was pleasantly surprised by the amount and variety of social and political criticism in the interviews. The female authors explicitly take, and sometimes are given, the roles of political actors. They take part in debates of various social, political, economic, environmental and cultural issues, such as racism, heteronormativity, civil rights, mental health system, unemployment, the financial crisis and animal rights. At times, the female authors even bring forward their opinions on current political debates, for example, in relation to elections – in spite of the fact that political agency has traditionally been seen alien to women (Gatens 1994, 24). However, considering authors as “great men [sic] of letters” or “public intellectuals” has a long history (Carbonnel 2004, 46: qtd. in Masschelein et al. 2014a), which hopefully increasingly applies to female authors as well. Nevertheless, the subordinate position of women and gender discrimination are by far the most common topics of social criticism pointed out and deliberated by the female authors – both in the context of society and the cultural field, and sometimes in an intersectional way, acknowledging other forms of social discrimination.

In general, a sense of gloominess prevails among the female authors in relation to social issues, but especially regarding progress made in gender equality in society. The progress made in the literary field and the prospects of furthering gender equality in the field are not seen as bleak. Yet, I was surprised that, in many ways, the female authors themselves and the (female) writers of the articles trivialise, marginalise and undermine the female authors’ position and existence as creative artists in the cultural field. With this, I particularly refer to the description and characterisation of the female authors’ appearance and personalities. Gloominess and doubting one’s talents and expertise probably partly result from the image of the artist and intellectual. However, I think that the ongoing, persistent discrimination and the negative image and lower value

of women and female authors have an effect on the female authors' outlook on themselves and society. At least to some extent, the outlook is internalised, and it influences unconsciously. Both the representation by the writers and the speech of the authors rely extensively on gender difference and the system of binary opposition. When the authors appear to transcend the limits of feminine stereotypes, it is usually done in a way that highlights stereotypes of the assumed contrary pole, masculinity that is – for example, in the discussion of female aggression. However, discussion of seemingly feminine experiences is much more common in the interviews.

In the analysis, I deliberated some of the reasons why the female authors (and writers) are so inclined to rely on stereotypically feminine subject matters and take up feminine positions, and I suggested that there is always a chance for subversive action in references to, for example, corporeality and (formerly) subordinate positions. A view commonly supported by post-structuralist and contemporary feminist theories is that power is structural and productive, and that the sites and processes of oppression are possible sites of resistance (Foucault 1990, 92–93; Mills 1997, 82). Yet, only rarely the authors directly aim at questioning and deconstructing feminine stereotypes, and probably least motherhood and meanings related to it. Nonetheless, when this is done, these comments are usually quite interesting and thought-provoking, like Rachel Cusk's remark on the historical and cultural specificity of motherhood:

*“[W]omen are changing, so what it means to have a baby is changing all the time,” she explains. “None of these things is resolved and all I’m trying to do is push the line a little bit further in terms of what you’re allowed to say. (Rachel Cusk, 3 Oct 2015)*

Although not the most original thought out there, at least it – and her literary work too, as suggested in the interview – aims at understanding female experience in a way that does not resort to the binary system of genders and gender difference right from the beginning.

To a large extent, the literary interviews with the female authors are based on stereotypical notions of the literary interview, women and men, gender, authors and artists, female authors and on opposed, resistive stances to these. Many conflicting stereotypes, approaches and objectives are present in the interviews, even within one and the same interview. Different feminist

approaches and objectives in particular seem to lie behind the authors' accounts of female experience, gender politics and women in the arts. These feminist objectives seem to represent the entire history of feminist criticism, as the views that the authors express vary from essentialism and quest for a somewhat universal feminist subject to social constructiveness of gender and intersectionality of difference and discrimination. For example, the authors' adherence to coalitional politics becomes evident in the authors' manner of describing their literary predecessors, inspirations and kindred spirits, who, for the most part, are other women.

In general, and similar to Butler (1999, 9), I see that the emphasis purely on women and the promotion of unity and communality between women become problematic. These actions potentially contribute to the intensification and reification of gender difference. Undeniably, the question of generalisation has been debated to and fro in feminist thinking (Rooney 2006a, 14), and Butler reminds feminist thinking to keep a wary eye on how it and its "feminist subjects" themselves are "discursive formation[s] and effect[s] of a given version of representational politics" and politics in general (1999, 3). The female authors do occasionally criticise some, usually earlier, feminist objectives and courses of action – usually the generalisation and prejudice inside the feminist movement. Yet, mainly, the female authors seem to pick and choose quite freely and sometimes even randomly from different alternatives from patriarchal stereotypes to critical feminist ideas.

There are definite parallels in the female authors' literary interviews that cannot be explained by the tradition of arts journalism or the genre of the literary interview, but seem to be related to the female authors' gendered position in society – gender-specific discourses, in other words. Perhaps the most important findings of my research are the general extent of gender-specific discourse in the literary interviews and the relative scarcity, polarity and randomness of perspectives and representational practices demonstrated inside the gender-specific discourse. The gender-specific discourses are not solely produced and maintained by the authors, but by the writers and the objectives and processes of journalism, arts journalism, the field of cultural production and

the public sphere as well. With the type of analysis conducted, I can merely speculate – as I do in the analysis to some extent – how each actor and factor contributes to the production of gender-specific discourses. Nevertheless, it is important at least to understand and acknowledge the existence of the various structures, strategies and conventions that take part in producing, maintaining, reproducing and distributing these discourses.

However, various questions are left unanswered. First of all, why do the female authors rely this extensively on the discourses of femininity and feminism? I was left wondering whether they are used to their advantage, or, more broadly, to what effect they are used. It is difficult to know whether the female authors' inclination to resort to certain subject matters and subject positions indicates resistance or compliance, and whether they even know themselves. Secondly, when certain kinds of subject matters, subject positions and discourses are this widespread and clearly emphasised in the interviews, what is left outside and perhaps discouraged? After all, repetition confirms discourses, and they can eventually become dominant and able to conceal alternatives (Mills 1997, 11–12). For example, if discussing female experience through the lens of various feminist approaches is this extensive in the interviews and, reading from the authors' comments, common in literature by female authors as well, then is it not limiting female authors' scope of speech? It is not direct subjugation, but it diminishes the field of possibilities similar to practices of structural discrimination. Finally, should this all be considered an investment to the future? At the very least, it is evident that there is still a need for critical discourses in the cultural field and society. For instance, despite the limited variety of subject matters and positions, the gender-specific discourses open up and produce alternatives within the discourses, for example, the understanding of female experience is definitely extended. Ultimately, all this connects with Foucault's conception that power is both restrictive and productive and resides in the structures and relations in society (1990, 92–93). Even though my thesis is not able to answer these broad dilemmas, it does reveal their existence and proposes that they should be acknowledged and deliberated more profoundly.



What remains unanswered is whether my research findings apply outside the research material, to the scattered, diverse, ever-changing group of female authors in real life. Probably not, as such. Yet, even if the objective is not to generalise, behind all research lies the idea of understanding reality (Ronkainen et al. 2011, 142). Traditionally, generalisability of qualitative analysis results is measured against *validity* and *reliability*, the former of which refers to how well the study represent the phenomenon and the latter to how well the study is conducted (ibid., 129–130). Both of these relate to the transparency and systematisation of analysis and thinking (ibid.). In general, my analysis and conclusions succeed well in illustrating some of the ways in which female authors represent themselves and in which they are represented in the cultural field and society. In the interviews, there are some remarkable parallels between structures, subject matters and position-takings, which I have emphasised. On the other hand, there are dissimilarities, differences in degree and opposing stances, which I have brought forward, too. Principally, my analysis was systematic and comprehensive and explained the choices made. I do not see any significant problems in the premises, methodological choices or process of my analysis – and many of the potential pitfalls I have already explained and illustrated in the methodology chapter. In addition, for example, in order to avoid misinterpretation in the analysis, and in the name of transparency, I have illustrated my findings with a number of direct quotations from the research material.

Nevertheless, some problems were caused by the phrasing of the research questions, which is quite wide, and the extent of my research problem, which is multidisciplinary and extends to various theoretical traditions and social arenas. Therefore, it is clear that different methodological choices and theoretical frames of reference could have led the analysis to different directions. For example, I only studied literary interviews, even when female authors contribute to various types of articles in arts journalism. Also, I lament not being able to make more theoretical underpinnings in the analysis, but this is partly explained by the extensive amount of research and theoretical thinking in one field, i.e. feminist criticism, and lack of research on the other, i.e. research on arts journalism – especially in the British context. Thus, many of the theoretical connections remain

mere references and examples, and the analysis greatly depends on my thematic analysis. In retrospect, a more precise phrasing of the research question would have been beneficial.

My thesis only scratches the surface of gender-specific discourses but it opens up various possibilities for further study. On one hand, male authors' interviews would prove an interesting research material as well – both on their own right, because the presumed default gender has not attracted as much attention as the female gender, and as comparison material for my findings. On the other hand, I am quite reluctant to propose a course of action based on comparison of genders, which would most likely only emphasise and confirm gender difference. Another, more specific course of action would be to research social relations between actors of the cultural field. Typically, in literary interviews, there are dozens of references to other authors, artists of different fields, and figures of cultural, social and political importance. Different types of connections are drawn between these people. For example, authors might name some people as their inspiration, state their gratitude to specific persons or describe their close, personal relationships with certain individuals, or, on the other hand, the writer of the article might form juxtapositions between different literary names. Mapping these interrelations might reveal interesting information about the literary field – about prestige and prejudice in the literary community and even commercial connections between actors. Offhand, I would argue that in my research material majority of references were between women. Yet, with a closer examination, various particularities would probably emerge.

Studying social relations between subjects is one of the key methods in discourse analysis, as, in society and culture, power is dispersed throughout social relations and it produces possible forms of behaviour as well as restricts them (Mills 1997, 20). Discourse analysis would certainly be a valuable method in studying gender-specific discourses. In addition to social relations, such aspects as rhetoric practices in adopting or assigning subject positions or narration of authors' literary career might be topics of interest in discourse analysis. Clearly, there is still plenty to research in the interrelations between journalism, literature and gender equality.

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Appendix 1 List of the Literary Interviews in the Research Material

Author	Known for...	Genre	Article series	Title	Writer	Published
<b>Julie Shaw</b>		Crime fiction	My Family Values	Our family's criminal past	Erwin James	03 Jan 2015
<b>Emily Woof</b>		Fiction	A Life in...	Emily Woof: 'I had to allow the romance to have its place'	Susanna Rustin	10 Jan 2015
<b>Helena Coggan</b>		Young adult fiction, fantasy	The Observer	An author at 15: 'teenage girls had to be ugly, naive or antisocial'	Kate Kellaway	01 Feb 2015
<b>Miranda July</b>	Performan- ce artist, filmmaker	Fiction	The Observer	Miranda July: 'I had some rough episodes when I was younger'	Elizabeth Day	08 Feb 2015
<b>Fay Weldon</b>		Fiction, screenwrit- ing, essay	Meet the Author	Fay Weldon: 'When I began, women needed to be taught the truth about love, babies, money, men'	Amanda Craig	09 Feb 2015
<b>Kelly Link</b>		Fantasy, short story		Kelly Link: freaky fairy tales	Michelle Dean	14 Feb 2015
<b>Katherine Heiny</b>		Short story, young adult fiction	Meet the Author	Katherine Heiny: 'There's time to hit a few high points and minimise your damage'	Kathryn Bromwich	15 Feb 2015
<b>Anna Tyler</b>		Fiction, short story	The Observer	Anne Tyler: 'I am not a spiritual person'	Tim Teeman	15 Feb 2015
<b>Celia Imri</b>	Actress	Fiction	Meet the Author	Celia Imrie: 'All the parts I'm writing are parts I'd like to play'	Alison Flood	22 Feb 2015
<b>Jenny Offill</b>		Fiction, poetry	A Life in...	Jenny Offill: life after Dept. of Speculation – the underdog persona's not going to fly any more	Lidija Haas	28 Feb 2015
<b>Polly Samson</b>		Fiction	A Life in...	Polly Samson: 'It's the most gleeful sort of writing there is'	Susanna Rustin	07 Mar 2015
<b>Lauren Oliver</b>		Young adult fiction		Lauren Oliver, author of Delirium trilogy: 'Writing is compulsive for me'	Michelle Dean	18 Mar 2015
<b>Sarah Hall</b>		Fiction, poetry	A Life in...	Sarah Hall: 'I love writing about sex, the civil veneer stripped off'	Sarah Crown	28 Mar 2015
<b>Hollie Poetry</b>	Performan- ce artist	Poetry	The Observer	Hollie Poetry: woman versus world – one poem at a time	Kathryn Bromwich	29 Mar 2015

<b>Monica Byrne</b>	Scientist	Science fiction		Monica Byrne: acclaimed novelist offers arresting visions of the future	Lydia Kiesling	17 Apr 2015
<b>Paula Hawkins</b>		Thriller		The Girl on the Train: how Paula Hawkins wrote 'the new Gone Girl'	Emine Saner	21 Apr 2015
<b>Toni Morrison</b>		Fiction	A Life in...	Toni Morrison: 'I'm writing for black people ... I don't have to apologise'	Hermione Hoby	25 Apr 2015
<b>Miriam Toews</b>		Fiction	A Life in...	Miriam Toews: 'I worried people would think, what is wrong with this family?'	Alice O'Keeffe	02 May 2015
<b>Minette Walters</b>		Crime fiction		Crime writer Minette Walters: 'I've done a lot of research into what makes a psychopath'	Mark Lawson	09 May 2015
<b>Meera Syal</b>	Comedian, singer, producer, actress	Fiction, drama	Lunch with...	Meera Syal: Right from the off I was an outsider, forced to think about who I was	Tim Adams	17 May 2015
<b>Ali Smith</b>		Fiction	Saturday Interview	Baileys prize winner Ali Smith: 'The canon is traditionally male. That is what this book is about'	Charlotte Higgins	05 Jun 2015
<b>Nell Zink</b>		Fiction		Nell Zink: the cuckoo of Bad Belzig	Paula Coccozza	17 Jun 2015
<b>Candace Bushnell</b>	Television producer	Fiction	The New Review Q&A	Candace Bushnell: 'It's fascinating to me, this insistence that a character is always based on an author's life'	Rachel Cooke	20 Jun 2015
<b>Nina Stibbe</b>		Fiction, auto-biography, memoir	A Life in...	Nina Stibbe: 'I wish I'd made Alan Bennett a bit funnier. But to me he was a middle-aged man'	Alex Clark	20 Jun 2015
<b>Louise O'Neill</b>		Young adult fiction	The Observer	Selfies, sex and body image – the revolution in books for teenage girls	Sarah Hughes	21 Jun 2015
<b>Annie Freud</b>	Great-grand-daughter of Sigmund Freud	Poetry	A Life in...	Annie Freud interview: 'Why I've finally embraced the family name'	Susanna Rustin	27 Jun 2015

<b>Claudia Rankine</b>	Poetry		Poet Claudia Rankine: 'The invisibility of black women is astounding'	Paula Coccozza	29 Jun 2015
<b>Paula Hawkins</b>	Thriller	The New Review Q&A	Paula Hawkins, thriller writer: 'I had to make a go of it... or give it up and get a new career'	Alex Clark	19 Jul 2015
<b>Hanya Yanagihara</b>	Fiction	The Observer	Hanya Yanagihara: 'I wanted everything turned up a little too high'	Tim Adams	26 Jul 2015
<b>NK Jemisin</b>	Fantasy, science fiction		NK Jemisin: the fantasy writer upending the 'racist and sexist status quo'	Noah Berlatsky	27 Jul 2015
<b>Sara Paretsky</b>	Crime fiction	A Life in...	Sara Paretsky interview: 'I start each VI Warshawski book convinced I can't do it'	Sarah Crown	07 Aug 2015
<b>Anne Enright</b>	Fiction	The New Review Q&A	Anne Enright: 'Ireland is my home but I feel I have been trying to leave all my life'	Alex Clark	09 Aug 2015
<b>Alice Hoffman</b>	Fiction, young adult fiction	Meet the Author	Alice Hoffman: 'For me, reading and magic always went together'	Anita Sethi	23 Aug 2015
<b>Val McDermid</b>	Crime fiction		Val McDermid: 'I'm working class – I wouldn't be able to go to Oxford now'	Hannah Ellis-Petersen	25 Aug 2015
<b>Rebecca Stead</b>	Children's literature		Rebecca Stead: 'In real life, there are always more than two doors'	Elizabeth Minkel	27 Aug 2015
<b>Pat Barker</b>	Fiction		Pat Barker interview: 'I'm edgy, but not dead pigeon sort of edgy'	Alex Clark	29 Aug 2015
<b>Perina Gappah</b>	Fiction, short story		Petina Gappah interview: 'I've written a very Zimbabwean story – we keep a lot of family secrets'	Claire Amitstead	05 Sep 2015
<b>Tessa Hadley</b>	Fiction, short story	Meet the Author	Tessa Hadley: 'I feel I've got the novel's rhythm now, and that's exciting'	Rachel Cooke	06 Sep 2015
<b>Jojo Moyes</b>	Fiction	Meet the Author	Jojo Moyes: 'I'd like to be the Puccini of fiction'	Hannah Beckerman	21 Sep 2015
<b>Lauren Groff</b>	Fiction		Lauren Groff: 'I didn't want there to be extramarital sex in this book'	Joanna Scutts	22 Sep 2015

<b>Vendela Vida</b>		Fiction	Meet the Author	Vendela Vida: 'You write to know you're not alone in the world'	Alex Clark	27 Sep 2015
<b>Eileen Myles</b>		Poetry		Eileen Myles: 'People just have to blow it up. That's what I've done for 30 years'	Michelle Dean	01 Oct 2015
<b>Rachel Cusk</b>		Fiction		Rachel Cusk interview: 'Medea is about divorce ... A couple fighting is an eternal predicament. Love turning to hate'	Susanna Rustin	03 Oct 2015
<b>Helen Simpson</b>		Fiction, short story	A Life in...	Helen Simpson interview: 'The great unspoken subject for couples is probably: whose job is more important?'	Sarah Crown	24 Oct 2015
<b>Erica Jong</b>		Fiction	The Observer	Erica Jong: 'There are a million ways of making love...'	Rachel Cooke	25 Oct 2015
<b>Erica Jong</b>		Fiction	My Family Values	Erica Jong: my family values	Anita Sethi	06 Nov 2015
<b>Jenny Diski</b>		Fiction, short story, autobiography, memoir, essay	A Life in...	Jenny Diski interview: 'The mediocrity of fiction is really to do with feeling cosy'	Robert Hanks	07 No 2015
<b>Sloane Crosley</b>	Publicist	Fiction	The New Review Q&A	Sloane Crosley, writer: 'I liked crawling into Nathaniel's mind. I've dated a guy like that...'	Rachel Cooke	08 Nov 2015
<b>Isobelle Carmody</b>		Fantasy, young adult fiction		Isobelle Carmody's 'blissful separation' from the Obernewtyn Chronicles	Monica Tan	11 Nov 2015
<b>Sophie Hannah</b>		Crime fiction	The Observer	Sophie Hannah: 'There are people who think a crime novel can't be proper literature... that's a shame for them'	Lisa O'Kelly	20 Dec 2015
<b>Paula Hawkins</b>		Thriller	Stories of 2015	Stories of 2015: Paula Hawkins, from struggling author to literary sensation	Alison Flood	21 Dec 2015
<b>Claudia Rankine</b>		Poetry	The New Review Q&A	Claudia Rankine: 'Blackness in the white imagination has nothing to do with black people'	Kate Kellaway	27 De 2015